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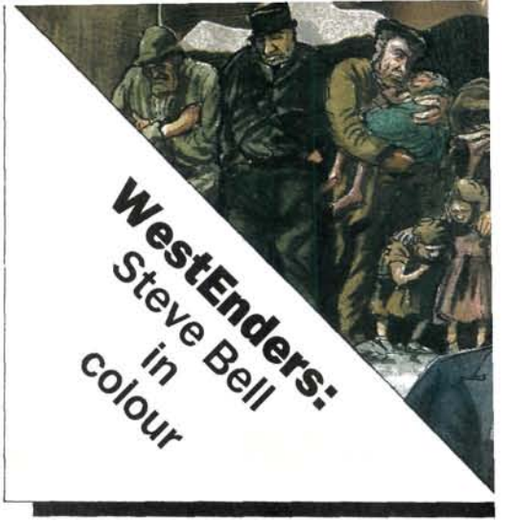
# STATESMAN

- Francis Wheen's Diary
- Can Neil liberalise Labour?
- Listening with Labour
- Sammy and Rosie Get Laid
- Independent Soviet left
- Late night telly pop



**WestEnders:** Steve Bell in colour

## HOSPITAL STRIKES

# Will the nurses win?

Cover photo: Maggie Murray & Brenda Prince/Format

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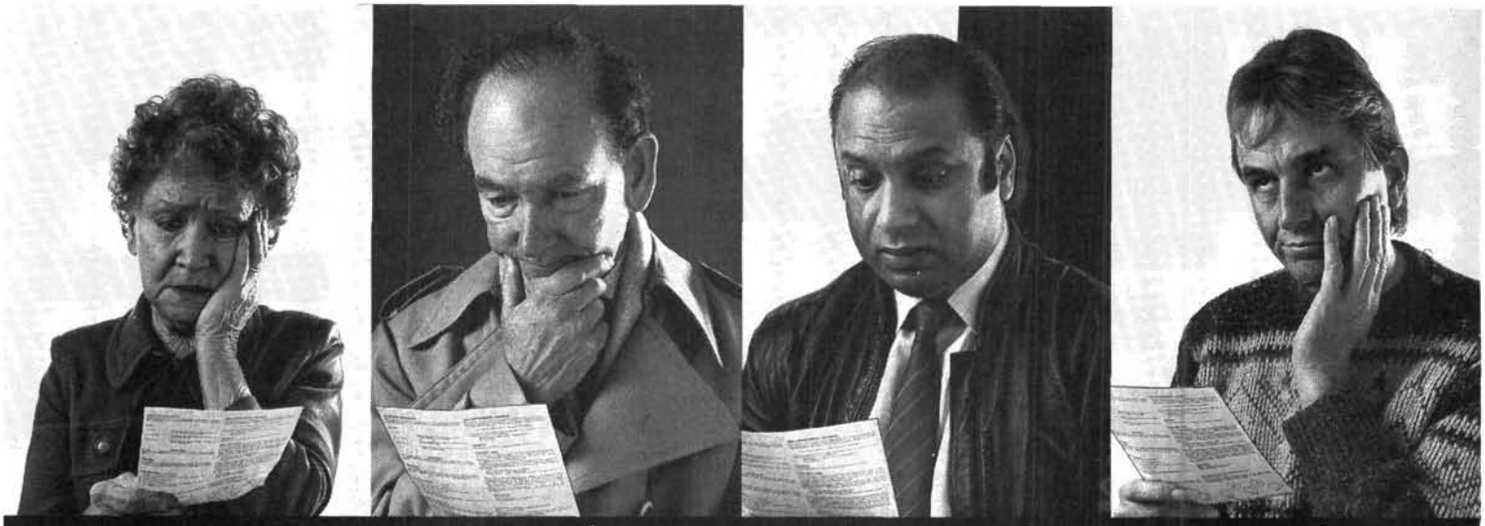

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NEW STATESMAN

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## NEXT WEEK

**Raymond Williams 1921-1988.** As a philosopher, novelist, media analyst and critic, his contribution to the intellectual vitality of the left is immeasurable. We will publish a full appreciation next week.

# Appalling vistas

"BUT, PRIME MINISTER, the whole point of an inquiry is not to find anything out." — Sir Humphrey Appleby, *Yes Minister*, BBC2, 27 February 1986.

IN BRITAIN, farce repeats itself as history of an especially unpleasant kind. The Attorney General (right) may or may not be an accomplice to murder, but he's made his office and country uncomfortably vulnerable to that accusation by his decision that no Royal Ulster Constabulary officers should stand trial for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice in the aftermath of three RUC "shoot-outs" in Northern Ireland.

Consider the facts (so far as they are known). RUC squads, specially trained by the SAS to act with "speed, firepower and aggression", shot dead six unarmed men (five of them with IRA or INLA connections) and seriously injured another in three incidents in the space of a month in 1982. Amidst allegations that the RUC was operating a "shoot-to-kill" policy, cover-ups were ordered from on high within the force and a bogus intelligence file was concocted to justify the killing of a young man with no terrorist history. Four RUC officers stood trial for murder and were acquitted, but the trials established publicly that officers had been ordered to lie.

The RUC's own internal inquiries failed to explain the killings satisfactorily, and in May 1984 John Stalker, deputy chief constable of the Greater Manchester police, was appointed to conduct an independent (but secret) inquiry. Stalker was apparently ignorant of the establishment's "Appleby rules" and his rigorous investigation was obstructed by no less a personage than the RUC chief constable, Sir John Hermon. In particular, Hermon repeatedly refused to hand over an MI5 tape which could possibly have established the truth about one of the killings. Meanwhile, Stalker fell victim to a smear campaign, was taken out of Northern Ireland and put under inquiry himself. He believed that he was the victim of a further cover-up.

The Attorney General's statement will have done nothing to dispel the stink of corruption which hangs over the whole affair. There was evidence, he said, of attempts to pervert the course of justice, but the "public interest" and "considerations of national security" demanded that there should be no prosecutions. (Strange, he failed also to call in aid that good old standby of the British state in distress, the Royal Prerogative.)

The fact is that the whole instinct of the British establishment is to cover up and refuse to admit to mistakes. That instinct is bred into the conduct of the civil service, police, judiciary and other public bodies — and into the behaviour of governments (Labour as well as Tory) which supposedly govern them. The justification is that public confidence in all such central institutions must at all costs be maintained. Lord Denning enunciated the doctrine with rare candour when, in 1980, he refused to allow the Birmingham Six to proceed with writs for assault against the police:

> Just consider the course of events if their action were to proceed . . . If [they] failed, it would mean that much time and money and worry would have been expended . . . If they won, it would mean that the police were guilty of perjury; that they were guilty of violence and threats; that [their] confessions were involuntary and improperly admitted in evidence; and that the convictions were erroneous . . . That is such an appalling vista that every sensible person would say, "It cannot be right that these actions should go any further" . . .

Such attitudes mean that injustice too frequently goes uncorrected, as Bob Woffinden demonstrates in his review of cases from Timothy Evans to the Birmingham pub bombings (*Miscarriages of Justice*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1987); and, indeed, that the judiciary actually refuses to allow research into the incidence of such miscarriages (which may be as high as 5 per cent of all cases). It also means that citizens of this country rarely have effective means of securing redress against mistakes or abuses of power by the police or other agencies of government.

In Northern Ireland, acquittals as well as convictions undermine public confidence in British justice. The principle remains the same, though people's suspicions are reinforced by the perception of the government's hand in all the operations of the police and judiciary.

The RUC has been working hard to establish confidence in the Republican community and the Diplock courts have enhanced their reputation.

But past doubts return to haunt the present. The Attorney General has now refused to allow more of the truth to emerge because he wants to keep secret the role of the security forces. And yet it is obvious to all from the partial information which has leaked out that the security forces in Northern Ireland were implicated up to their necks in killings, unlawful raids and dirty tricks.

After we go to press this week, the Court of Appeal announces its verdict on the appeal of the six Irishmen unjustly convicted in 1975 of the Birmingham pub bombings. However that verdict goes, Irish confidence in Britain's role there has sustained a damaging blow this week. It would be a tragedy if it were to be a double blow. □



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## DIARY

Thirty-five Labour MPs voted for David "Creeping Jesus" Alton's anti-abortion bill; others (that means you, Kaufman, and you, Hattersley) assisted its passage by abstaining. This is allowed because abortion, like hanging but unlike everything else, is an "issue of conscience" on which MPs are free to vote as they please.

It's high time this bogus distinction was ended. Any number of subjects which are discussed in the House — nuclear weapons, poverty, unemployment, overseas aid — could be defined as matters of "conscience" too. Why is it a mortal offence for a Labour MP to vote against the party line on belonging to NATO if another MP can support David Alton's contemptible bill with impunity? Either you have a system of party discipline or you don't. A three-line whip on the Third Reading would be a good start; a three-line whip last Friday would have been a better one.

○

There's a certain type of brain-dead Tory MP who is always ready to denounce the "nanny state"; the same type of Tory MP was to be seen packing the Aye lobby for the Alton Bill, in spite of its being the epitome of Nanny Statism.

Another charming contradiction. While North Yorkshire's Conservative MPs were helping the abortion bill through the House last Friday, their comrades in Tory-controlled North Yorkshire Council were deciding to close the county's three day nurseries. Parents will be supplied with a list of private child-minders (for whom they must pay an extra £30 a week) and told to scarper, taking their offspring with them. Conservative policy on this question, as I understand it, now seems to be as follows: no trouble or expense must be spared to protect the foetus, but as soon as the little blighter pops out of the womb it must be made to stand on its own two feet forthwith. Or have I missed something?

○

What is one to say about Christopher Nolan, whose book *Under the Eye of the Clock* has won the Whitbread Award for literature, without seeming either callous or patronising? Of course I'm glad that he's £20,000 the richer. Of course I'm pleased that he can now expect royalties galore (in Oxford last Saturday both Dillons and Blackwells had sold out). And of course I salute his achievement in managing to write at all with cerebral palsy.

But to name *Under the Eye of the Clock* as the book of the year really is absurd. Nolan's autobiographical tale is affecting enough in places — how could it not be? But much of the writing is simply gibberish: "School life drained candid hearsay, but bread kneaded by Cassandra banked love's medley. Cambered, Joseph ceased to waste fears, school was cradling him and fading sadness vested cells of lenient mercy." And the obsessive alliteration is extremely wearing: "Queer questioning answered his dark dreams. Much foolhardy frankness mesmerised his mind." Hundreds of adolescents write like this, having eaten too big a helping of Hopkins, Joyce and Dylan Thomas. Most grow out of it. By over-praising Nolan, the Whitbread judges have probably guaranteed that he won't.

○

For the past year George Galloway, the burly MP for Glasgow Hillhead and former general secretary of War on Want, has been on the receiving end of all sorts of accusations (see *NS* 11 Sept and 2 Oct 1987).

And still they keep on coming. Late last year, as part of the investigation into Galloway's expenses, War on Want sent the secretary of Hillhead Labour Party (at her home address) a copy of Galloway's claims for trips between London and Glasgow, which the charity had paid. But the Hillhead secretary never received the envelope: instead, earlier this month she was told by Galloway that *he* had acquired it and that he intended to hang on to it.

In other words, the letter — which was clearly addressed to the secretary and marked "Private and Confidential" — had been nicked. Galloway's conduct is known in the trade as handling stolen property, and is an offence. Perhaps the Glasgow police might care to investigate.

○

Meanwhile, War on Want will soon appoint a Director of Membership — one of several well-paid new jobs in "senior management". Since the post hasn't been advertised, there is only one applicant, Steve Morgan, the present membership secretary. Can this be the same Steve Morgan who was until recently a councillor in Greenwich, who resigned from the council just as he was about to be kicked off anyway for persistent non-attendance, and who was at the centre of controversy for claiming £330 in "additional duty" expenses from the council between April and August last year in spite of not attending a single council meeting in that period?

It can indeed. And who is providing a reference for this character? A certain George Galloway.

○

The news that Tony Benn might stand for the Labour leadership transported me straight back to those dear dead days of the late '70s and early '80s, when it was impermissible to say you were "on the Labour Left" unless you swore fealty to the Sage of Holland Park. I was never able to raise much enthusiasm for that. In spite of their spiritual leader's pious injunction to deal in "policies, not personalities", the Bennite movement was the nearest thing to a personality cult in the Labour Party since the time of Nye Bevan. And the hero himself had sat in the Cabinet throughout the 1974-79 government — through the IMF cuts and all the other horrors — without once feeling obliged to resign. Huh!

The end of that era can be dated quite precisely to the summer of 1983, when Benn announced that the disastrous June election result had actually been a victory for socialism. At this point even the Sage's most devoted disciples began to wonder if their man hadn't passed his sell-by date.

But at least one thing could be said for Benn in the old days: the violence of the campaign against him by the Tories and Fleet Street suggested that perhaps he really was a threat to all they held dear. Not now, though. The other day I picked up a magazine which introduced its profile of Benn thus: "James Hanning talked to Tony Benn, the Public Enemy Number One of the Tory press and found him ingenuous and by no means a loony." The article went on to argue that "as a keen analyst and impressive speaker, he could have been a great reforming prime minister". This was printed in a glossy called *Property and Investment*, delivered free to houses in Mayfair, Belgravia and the like. When the fat cats feel able to praise rather than vilify you, it's time to start worrying.

○

The scene: a grand musical soiree in North Buckinghshire. During the interval, when food and drink are served, a guest joins the queue at a table laden with cheese. Feeling that the women next to her looks somehow familiar, she greets her and praises the selection of cheeses.

"Yes," replies Margaret Thatcher (for it is she), in her most sickly patriotic contralto, "but I think I'd better stick to the British cheeses." Whereupon she carves herself a large slice.

"But that's the brie that you're cutting!" the other woman protests.

Mute fury crosses the prime ministerial face. "Let's call it Lymeswold," she growls.

**Francis Wheen**

## ROGER WODDIS

### Nothing is fouler

*Norman Fowler, the Employment Secretary, has demanded that nursing unions "get their tanks off the streets"*

Nothing is fouler than Fowler.
Whatever he's asked to perform,
No matter how stinking,
He does without thinking.
Nobody smells like our Norm.

The nurses, the nurses are coming!
Their Churchills have blood on their treads.
To heighten the drama
They've brought up their armour
To murder the sick in their beds.

Children are dying of cancer,
Hospital wards have been closed,
Which merits your curses
For underpaid nurses,
But never the crime they've exposed.

Nothing is fouler than Fowler.
Call him a man if you like —
But study each feature,
You're left with a creature
Who rubbishes nurses on strike.



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**BEN PIMLOTT**

# How nurses can win, even with their hands tied behind their backs

NORMAN TEBBIT has a charming way of putting things. During last week's health service debate, he told MPs that public money was too often spent, not on the basis of need, but of "decibel of squeal". Why are nurses the victims of poor working conditions, inadequate accommodation, antiquated training? Why does a skilled profession get paid at a level that is derisory compared with many occupations that require lower qualifications? Mr Tebbit, with his sexist "decibel of squeal" remark, put his finger on a key reason: ninety per cent of nurses are women.

Like most offensive phrases, however, this insult was also an expression of fear. In the row over the health service, the government has the battalions to win. What alarms it is that — in contrast to all previous disputes with public sector workers — the battle over nurses' pay stands a good chance of capturing the public imagination. Tebbit, indeed, was not describing what has happened in the past but the prospect ministers and especially the Prime Minister most dread in the future.

The nurses are particularly important because of the symbolic place the National Health Service has always held in the battle between rival philosophies. Not only was the health service set up in its modern form by a non-Conservative government, the provision of free health care has been the best feature, in the public mind, of the social welfare vision. Tories have always felt nervous about the NHS, accepting it as a *fait accompli* after 1951, and promising, until now, never to attack it. Today, it is the most costly of the public services, with pay eating up the lion's share of expenditure. Thus, on the one hand, to give in to the nurses would threaten the Tories' housekeeping ideology. On the other. the government has to be wary of desecrating a temple which even its own supporters respect.

Hence the government plans to be as inflexible as it can, while half-acknowleging that it will have to give way a little. "You can't automatically say that you will accept whatever the [pay review body] recommend", said Mrs Thatcher this week. "You have a duty to look at the whole burden on the taxpayer." The review body reports in April. One question, in the meantime, is whether the citizen as "taxpayer" can be persuaded that it is a burden that ought to be borne.

From the Prime Minister's point of view, the trouble is that nurses are maddeningly popular. The whole world does not love a civil servant or a teacher. But when it comes to nurses, almost everyone goes dewy-eyed. No doubt it is guilt, or superstition, mixed up with sentimentality. Through memory or hope, there is an instinctive sympathy towards the female infantry who run the health service, and this has been strengthened by recent events.

IN ELECTORAL TERMS (and even in the first year of a parliament governments worry about these things) much of the argument is irrelevant. The public doesn't care a fig whether Mrs Thatcher has spent more or less than some long-forgotten Labour administration. It is bored to tears by management structures, and probably regards Mrs Thatcher's hastily conceived NHS "review" as a distant abstraction. It can put up with angry consultants, with a well-fed look, complaining that the allure of bigger salaries in the United States is almost impossible to resist.

What does bother it, though, is the physical evidence of decline: festering waiting-rooms and repeatedly postponed operations, empty wards and better-off patients getting preferential treatment. And what seems to arouse it most of all is the sight of uniformed nurses protesting, not only for themselves, but also about the visible deterioration of the once-splendid organisation to which they dedicate their lives.

> ***"Possibly there are power-crazed, anarchistic nurses who spend their 2 am tea breaks plotting how they will bring the democratically-elected government to its knees. But it is hard to make a convincing case of it"***

What noises do miners or railway workers make when they are annoyed — gutteral growls and deep-throated shouts? Neither are as threatening as the nurses' "squeals". Reputation is an important thing. Possibly there are power-crazed, anarchistic nurses who spend their 2 am tea breaks plotting how they will bring the democratically-elected government to its knees. But it is hard to make a convincing case of it. The nurses' strength in the present dispute is also their historic weakness: that they have been known since the days of Florence Nightingale for the forbearance with which they have accepted whatever crumbs have been left them from the public-sector cake.

THE PROBLEM for the nurses is how best to cash their moral credit. They have little direct bargaining power, and no industrial muscle. In the past, they have been exploited because they are young, single, female and don't expect to stay in the profession for long. But above all — something that has little to do with the Royal College's "no strike" rule —because of the actual impossibility of serious industrial action. The irony of the threatened strike by some nurses is that it is only conceivable because the overwhelming majority will not be taking part in it.

That nurses should be driven to the brink, and even in some places to step over it, is a development that is having a powerful impact on opinion. Last week's Gallup poll showed 68 per cent rejecting the notion that the NHS is safe in Tory hands, a figure that included 41 per cent of Conservative supporters. Only 17 per cent, including a mere 36 per cent of Tory voters, accepted that the government was handling health care well. These sharp shifts in opinion appear to be in response to the nurses' recent protests. For the nurses' leaders, the task is to keep up the momentum of action that will hold public attention, without — as happened, disastrously, in the teachers' dispute — inviting charges of irresponsibility.

THERE SHOULD be little difficulty in maintaining the present level of anger. There is no major occupation that has such a backlog of justifiable grievance. Thus, the average gross earnings of female nursing and midwifery staff are only 59 per cent of the average for all non-manual men. The government justifies appallingly low pay (a newly-qualified enrolled nurse gets about £120 a week) on the grounds of "market forces". Perhaps General Haig used a similar argument when explaining his strategy on the Somme.

The health service only fails to collapse in the face of massive wastage (a third of nurses never complete training, and most of the rest leave within a few years of doing so) because a quarter of all female school-leavers with between five O and two A levels are prepared to enter the profession, plugging the gaps in a 500,000-strong workforce. The supply is fast running out. Apart from the shortage of specialist nurses that has already been highlighted, a lower birth rate means that there could be a catastrophic shortfall in the 1990s.

That dissatisfaction is not confined to a few protesters is shown by a Harris poll last October, which revealed that more than two-thirds of third-year students had contemplated dropping out during the preceding twelve months, 81 per cent for financial reasons.

Yet the nurses know that they cannot force the government's hand. Instead, they face a possibly long-drawn-out psychological war. The citadel is public support. If at present the nurses hold it, they will need to show patience and skill not to be displaced.

For ministers, though there are virility points to be gained by staying mean, there is also a danger that a winter of hole-in-the-heart babies and nurses carrying placards could start a shift in mood. "Social welfare" is not a fashionable concept in the stony eighties. The disaster for the government will be if the nurses can begin to make it so. □

*See Jolyon Jenkins p10 and Julian Le Grand p12.*



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# Liberal octopus embraces itself

*Blackpool*

AS THICK SNOW swirled round the Liberal Special Assembly last Saturday the sane person's vision of hell seemed nigh, viz being marooned in a Blackpool hotel while 2,700 Liberals explored their true identity.

It was a mixed blessing that, by the end of the day, both the speeches and the snow had turned into slush. Welsh MP Geraint Howells started the thaw by assuring everyone how warmly lovely they were ("There'll always be a welcome in the hillsides for you David"); Michael Meadowcroft slipped off the platform of the evening's *Liberal News* rally telling his audience his band had to practise "Wish Me Luck as You Wave Me Goodbye" and Malcolm Bruce, MP for Gordon, likened his party to the family in *Dear Octopus*. This 1930s play by Dodie Smith is much loved by amateur theatricals for its unparalleled sentimentality. By the end, all are embraced in its loving folds and the Son proclaims the family's heroic qualities: 'How else has it survived?"

Liberals have certainly depended on heroic qualities of tolerance to survive intact up to now. But if the anti-mergerites were hoping to persuade the majority of the 2,700 delegates in Blackpool — the largest gathering of Liberals ever — that they now represented this true spirit of Liberalism, their speeches let them down. For all the talk of heart-rending decisions, the metaphors of being orphaned and dispossessed, there was scarcely a wet eye in the place. The speeches ran an emotional gamut from insistent and tired to waspish and sour. With the exception of an heroically wild speech from Claire Brooks, in which she appeared to attribute European fascism to the 1918 split in the British Liberal Party, the anti-mergerites failed to come up with the vision or the passion that might have, at least, boosted their numbers into a respectable opposition.

In essence, they argue that Liberalism was doing very well until an era of pacts and coalitions came along to stunt its development. Lesley Abdela, best known for the 300 Group, working to get women into the Commons, dated the start of "merger mania" from David Steel's leadership. Left to itself, Liberalism would have followed its true course of free-flowing radicalism. Diverted into the false channel of social democracy, true Liberalism will stagnate and die. There would be a better future if Liberals would "grasp the moment and dare to be a Liberal" said Michael Meadowcroft.

But his, the final anti-merger speech of the day, was not heroic and in taking a sideswipe at Paddy Ashdown as a Johnny Come Lately added to the waspish tone of the opposition. The applause was subdued. In particular, he has failed to make any ground with his principal argument, put at countless meetings. This is that there was too much talk of opposition to Thatcher, as though all opponents could be jumbled together as one coherent group, and not enough of attacking Labour's authoritarianism. Peter Bowler, one of a handful of Liberal Councillors on Rotherham's staunchly old-fashioned Labour council, has every sympathy with his argument. Sporting his "I am one of the 385" badge on Sunday morning he said that without a radical Liberalism, there would be no opposition to such right-wing Labour councils; and merger with the SDP would mean the same sort of right-wing social democracy. But demography puts such politics in a small minority. And the argument lacks grandeur.

It is casting themselves in the heroic role of David who will overthrow the Thatcherite Goliath which rallies most Liberals, and those supporting the merger were able to offer members the heroic role. Knowing they would win, they could also afford to sound more generous in their pleas to all to stay in the party. But, above all, they could rely on the forces of history to carry their argument. Des Wilson got a loud round of applause when, mourning the 20 years of his activism in which all measures of civilisation had worsened, he said: "Time is running out. The chance of power and the chance to put our ideals into practice is receding. We must not condemn the younger members of this party to another 20 years of impotence."

At the end of the day, those opposing merger were a rag bag of party and regional chauvinists and Radicals opposed to social democracy. And the Radicals were divided, as Hannan Rose, editor of *Radical Quarterly* discovered; addressing a packed meeting of Radicals on Sunday morning he was sharply reprimanded from the floor for assuming Radical meant anti-merger. That argument had not been clearly made and certainly not won. The anti-merger Radicals were in an impossible position. Two parties competing for the ground of non-socialist progress would be suicidal. But one party with a centralised constitution will mean a strengthened "centrist" momentum and an increase in factionalism. History may have forced them into merger; it didn't promise them electoral victory.

**Sarah Benton**

# Hole in the floor

COUNCIL HOUSING has been undermined by the Conservative government for years. Right-to-buy sales together with capital spending restrictions have seen the privatisation of council homes without corresponding new building. But the latest kick in the teeth — an apparently innocuous rule change contained in the housing White Paper to abolish the "cost floor" — could finally kill off the prospects of councils providing any new or renovated housing for rent at all.

The "cost floor" is a simple device to prevent right-to-buy discounts bringing the purchase price

## If the caption fits

*No 52*

You thought we'd put the Duchess of York in this week. Go on, admit it. But along comes the nurses' strike and saves us all from having to fall back on the next royal pregnancy. Captions, speech or thinks bubbles in by Monday 8 February on a postcard please. Ten-pound book token for the winner.

*Winner: No 50*

Mrs Thatcher: "This sugar cane is safe in our hands." (*Peter Bingham, Chester.*) Runners up (no prize, sorry!): "It's good, Mr Moi, but I think nuclear weapons suit our soldiers better." (*Brian Ruth, London.*); "What you third world people need to remember is there's always a job that needs to be done. For instance, when nature calls, do I stop work? Of course not . . ." (*John Warburton, London.*)



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of a house below what a council has recently spent on a dwelling. For example, a two bedroom house in Plymouth completed in August 1987 cost £32,800 to build. With the cost floor in operation the house could not be sold for less than this amount. But without a cost floor, a council tenant could claim a 46 per cent discount on the market value of £39,000. He or she would therefore only pay £21,000, leaving Plymouth council with an £11,000 debt but no house.

The knock-on effects of abolishing the cost floor will be disastrous. Those rich enough to buy bargain-basement council houses will do so, leaving fewer tenants to finance a burgeoning local council debt. The result: higher rents. And councils will be increasingly forced to resort to expensive bed and breakfasts to house their homeless.

Councils and non-charitable housing associations (which are affected in the same way) will no longer wish to build new homes for fear of saddling themselves with huge debts.

There are two glimmers of light which may save the cost floor. First, its abolition will wreck housing associations' chances of raising private capital, thus extinguishing a future source of cheap rented housing which the Tories are banking on. Second, Thamesmead Town, the private trust backed by the Department of the Environment to take over ex-GLC housing, could be bankrupted if the cost floor goes. It stands to lose £17-30,000 on each of its recently built or renovated dwellings. ●

# The smell of death

WHEN PRESIDENT Nicholae Ceausescu, self-styled "Conducator" of Romania, celebrated his 70th birthday this week the froth of personality cult whipped up around him extended to a fabricated telegram from Queen Elizabeth in the Romanian news weekly *Lumea*, praising him as a "statesman of world stature". Foreign journalists — and even some diplomats—were, unusually, excluded from the festivities.

It is beginning to dawn on the Conducator that cracks are appearing in his feet of clay; the presence of foreign journalists might encourage domestic protest in the wake of the November riots by some 10,000 workers in Brasov which spread to eight other cities. And there are other reasons why Romanians may choose this moment to protest against bitter deprivations and a crushing of human rights which has left Ceausescu without the support of a single sector of the population — not even the peasants, his traditional constituency.

Initiated by Charter 77, the Czech intellectual human rights group, 1 February is to be a day of European solidarity with the people of Romania. "There is a country in Europe," say the Chartists, "where people have neither heat nor light. In Romanian flats and offices the temperature in winter rarely rises above 10°C. Each flat is allowed a maximum of two 40-watt bulbs to be burning at any given time . . ." (*Palach Press*, January 1988).

The significance of demonstrations in Western European capitals, organised by a strange coalition of right-leaning Romanian exiles, indigenous communist parties and human rights supporters, will be outweighed in impact by the expected protests in Eastern Europe: in Hungary and possibly Poland as well as Czechoslovakia. Not because Ceausescu himself will take any notice of criticism from either bloc: he has always made a nationalistic virtue out of blowing a raspberry at both. News reach[illegible]omanians, though, of other Eastern E[illegible]pe[illegible]sking arrest in protest can only fan the tiny, flickering flames of rebellion in a country [illegible]political dissent has been so squeezed that, [illegible]to an article by Ben Webb in European [illegible] Disarmament *Journal*, the state police force, *Securitate*, is the only alternative power centre. Silviu Brucan, former editor of the party daily *Scintea*, made a disguised appeal recently for the secret police to put pressure on Ceausescu.

The "complete despair" of the Romanians, which the Chartists talk of, is a result of a stifling of all political activity and a grinding poverty. Romania is the poorest member of COMECON, and a victim of Stalinist forced industrialisation which has gutted its agricultural base. Basic foodstuffs are always rationed or in short supply; what little produce there is, is exported to the Soviet Union to pay for the crippling energy bill. Any will to fight in the Church or intelligentsia was stamped on by the Conducator early in his fanatically personalised regime.

However, according to Jonathan Eyal, a London-based Romanian specialist quoted by Webb, the smell of death is pervasive in Romania — Ceausescu's days are numbered. "He has been a master of balance, walking a tightrope, and the tension in the rope was provided by East and West. Romania could play on tensions in the Middle East, in Europe, between China and the USSR. Now detente is on the return, the rope has gone slack." But like other dictators, he is unlikely to fall without more of his victims losing their lives in the process.

**Jane Dibblin**

# Another pre-election lie uncovered

THE REAGAN-GORBACHEV deal on removing intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe is well on the way to being undermined. NATO Commander General Galvin is now seeking approval from the US Congress for funds for "a new nuclear arsenal for Europe" to "offset the firepower that would be lost under the INF treaty". By the mid-1990s, the plan is to place 1,300 new air-launched and 380 sea-launched cruise missiles in west Europe, plus a battery of short-range land-based ballistic and cruise missiles.

The crucial decisions to deploy this arsenal were taken in 1983 — the "Montebello" decision of NATO's Nuclear Planning Group meeting in Canada. Margaret Thatcher and her ministers have deliberately misled MPs about this decision. In May 1987, she stated: "Ministers agreed at Montebello that the number of nuclear weapons in Europe should be reduced and that steps should be taken to ensure the effectiveness, responsiveness and survivability of the residual stockpile. In this context, they identified a range of possible improvements. However, no decisions were taken at this meeting on specific measures to achieve this."

That's not what the Dutch and US governments say. Caspar Weinberger reported to Congress in 1984 that the Montebello meeting endorsed proposals which included "specific" findings and recommendations for "Improvements to Shorter Range Intermediate/Short Range Nuclear Force Systems and Warheads". The Dutch defence minister gave details of these "recommendations" — or "programme of requirements" for Holland — including replacing Lance missiles with a follow-on Lance with a greater range and introducing new air-to-ground short-range weapons; and confirmed that the installation of these stand-off weapons on aircraft "does indeed fall under the Montebello decision".

"Moreover," he added, "the programme of requirements is generally directed, and applies in principle to all countries that have a particular weapon system."

There's hard evidence too which contradicts Mrs Thatcher. The US is already deploying new nuclear shells in West Germany, and work is well underway by the US and NATO on building the air-launched missiles and a new short-range ballistic missile. US officials continually cite the Montebello decision in funding requests to Congress.

Before the election, the government gave nothing away about the secret decisions to deploy this new nuclear weaponry. By the mid-1990s, some 700 air-launched cruise missiles will be deployed on British and US aircraft stationed in Britain — with an overall range similar to that of the 160 ground-launched cruise missiles being removed from Greenham and Molesworth.

No attempt is being made to negotiate these weapons away. Indeed, Mrs Thatcher is busting a gut to stop the West Germans from responding to a Soviet and East German proposal for a freeze on new deployment, pending negotiations to reduce both nuclear and conventional forces in Europe.

How, meanwhile, will the Commons take not merely to being misled yet again, but in effect to being deprived of any right to control defence policy? This is another in the series of scandals — the *Belgrano*, Westland, Zircon — which is undermining the authority of parliament. Tam Dalyell, please note.

**Dan Plesch**


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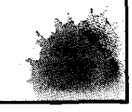




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**POLITICS OF ENVY**

# What Tories do with public money

THE LORD HELPS those who helps themselves — and so does Mrs Thatcher. Here's a wonderful scheme for the already rich to acquire factories at the government's expense; and here are some of the new rich, who have prospered through enterprise, initiative, and other Tory values, by marketing the fabulous free offer.

Pop stars, politicians, television personalities and other top earners are legally avoiding tax by buying up commercial properties in Britain's 25 enterprise zones. The zones were launched in 1981 to regenerate run-down areas by offering tax subsidies, no rates and less strict planning control. The total cost to the public purse of this experiment has been over £300 million. It has "created" about 13,000 jobs at a massive cost of £23-30,000 per job, according to Department of the Environment figures, and has mostly succeeded in moving businesses into zones from their surrounding areas. And it has made a small number of people very rich indeed.

The 1984 Budget abolished tax allowances on capital spending by businesses — except in enterprise zones. This exception opened the way for enterprise zone property to be sold as a tax shelter for rich individuals. A book published this week (*A Guide to Investment in Enterprise Zones*, Longmans), with a foreword by former Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine, explains how it works: "If an individual has taxable income, after personal allowances, of £100,000 in 1987/88 then tax of £51,658 is due. If in that year the individual were to buy a building in an enterprise zone at a cost of £100,000 then he would pay no tax at all. Thus the net cost to him is approximately £48,000 and a loan of that amount . . . would almost certainly be completely serviced, interest and capital, by the rent received from letting the building."

The investor is not the only beneficiary. Enterprise Zone Developments is a London-based company working as a contact agency for rich people in search of a tax haven. EZD buys properties in enterprise zones, sells them on to its wealthy clients and manages them on their clients' behalf.

Brian Williams, chairman of EZD, and like his fellow directors a former tax inspector, says that to most investors the deal "seems too good to be true". Not surprisingly, EZD takes a substantial cut from the deals it handles. Brian Williams paid himself £690,000 in the year to June 1985 (the last for which accounts have been filed at Companies House). He invests much of his salary in tax-free properties himself, and so benefits twice over from his former employer's generosity.

So who are these "pop stars and politicians" that EZD counts among its clients in its promotional literature? The company won't say, and English property law is designed to prevent the general public finding out. Property is, after all, private. In Scotland the law is different, and there is an enterprise zone in Dundee. But pop stars and politicians seem to know this: extensive investigations in the General Register of Sasines (the Scottish equivalent of the Land Registry) turned up no one more exciting than Joseph Saracine, the managing director of Allied Carpets.

This government has been very generous to the rich, but the tax breaks from enterprise zone property are quite spectacular. As the Chancellor ponders bringing down the top rate of tax supposedly paid by people earning over about £50,000 a year from 60p in the pound, he might like to think about the number of devices which enable people earning over £100,000 a year to pay 0p in the pound. In the foreword to Longmans' book Heseltine "freely concedes that there is rough justice in [the enterprise zone] approach". He can say that again.

**John Rentoul, Tom Loxley and Rob Edwards**

## 1968 supplement

Copies of our 1968 supplement (published Christmas 1987) are available at 75p for individual copies and 50p each for bulk orders (20 or more). Orders with remittance to *NS* office. Please mark envelope "1968 supplement".

West Enders
THE WAYS OF THIS HOUSE MAY SEEM SOMEWHAT IDIOSYNCRATIC TO AN OUTSIDER...
BIEN SÛR, MONSIEUR LE SPEAKÈRE
...IT MAY SEEM SILLY THAT MEMBERS MUST PRAY FACING THEIR SEATS SO THEIR SWORDS DON'T POKE THE UPHOLSTERY
...YOU MIGHT THINK IT FOOLISH THAT A MEMBER WHO WISHES TO RAISE A POINT OF ORDER DURING A DIVISION MUST WEAR AN ANCIENT SET OF MICKEY MOUSE EARS...
...BUT NEVER FORGET THAT SUCH TRADITIONAL VALUES LIE AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR DEMOCRACY!!!
AH! COMME LE "FAIR PLAY"?
EXACTLY!
...ET LE "OMELESSNESS", LE "PEUVERTY", LE "BACKSTREET ABEURTION", LE "WORK'OUSE" ET LE "EEPEURCRISY"??
JUST SO!
Applicants for admission to an N.H.S. ward 1992 after Luke Fildes R.A.
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**NEWSTATESPERSON**

## Falkirk firebrand

DENNIS CANAVAN, the red-bearded hard-left Labour MP for Falkirk West, seems to be much loved by everyone except his socialist colleagues. Last week the Scottish Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind MP, described him as the Tory party's "best secret weapon" in Scotland. This week the deputy leader of the Scottish National Party, Alex Salmond MP, revealed that Canavan's antics had persuaded him to revise his dismissal of Labour's Scottish MPs as the "feeble 50". From now on, he said, he would call them "the fighting one and the feeble 49".

Yet in Labour circles it is now difficult to find anyone prepared to offer a kind word on his behalf. "He's flipped his lip," said one senior figure. "There is immense hostility and resentment towards him," said a fellow MP. Last year Canavan came bottom of the poll for the Labour Group of Scottish MPs' executive.

The reason why he has become the centre of such attention is his increasingly bizarre attempts to disrupt parliament business. Shortly after the election last year, he forced a vote in the House of Commons by use of the ancient parliamentary procedure of declaring "I spy strangers". He was protesting about the interference of a group of Tory MPs from English constituencies during Scottish question time. Unfortunately the result of his protest was a split among Scots Labour MPs and a clutch of uncomplimentary headlines.

Undeterred, he decided to continue his one-man war last week. On the first day that the Commons committee considering the Housing (Scotland) Bill met, he planted himself firmly on the Labour benches. Though not a member of that committee, he refused repeated requests from his Labour colleagues to leave, saying that he would only go if the two English Tories who had been drafted onto the committee came with him. The proceedings had to be abandoned for the day.

The following morning Canavan appeared again, but announced that he would comply with the request to leave in view of a Tory motion that would have given the Labour committee chair, Michael Martin, the power to call upon the Serjeant at Arms to eject him. Canavan then marched down the committee corridor into the first day's proceedings on the English poll tax bill and plonked himself on the Labour benches. He is not a member of that committee either, and its sitting had to be suspended for 20 minutes. He only agreed to leave after Labour's shadow local government minister, Jeff Rooker MP, moved a motion reporting him to the Speaker.

Other than infuriating his fellow MPs, it is difficult to see what the short-fused Falkirk firebrand has achieved. Some say he was trying to limit the damage his radical credentials would suffer from his support for David Alton's abortion bill last Friday (Canavan is a practising Roman Catholic). Others complain that his sporadic outbursts only occur between long trips abroad on behalf of a committee of which he is a member — that dealing with foreign affairs.

Both accusations are probably unfair. Canavan's motives are simple. He is the nearest thing Labour has to a Scottish Nationalist. He hates the English Tory rule of socialist Scotland with a vehemence which is refreshing to behold but impossible to control. ●

**POLITICAL SKETCH**

## Sir Percival centre stage

**Edward Pearce**

ONE COULD swear, really one could. Here is the Attorney General giving a very fair impression of a tethered barrage balloon at a loss for coherent argument. Various sensible people — Stuart Bell, Merlyn Rees, Seamus Mallon, Simon Hughes, even, Lord God deliver us, Martin Flannery — are asking the right sorts of difficult question, leaving the poor klutz opening and shutting his mouth in defence of his failure to prosecute men deemed by senior police officers to have perverted the course of justice.

All poor Sir Patrick can say, in that pained and costive voice of his, is that the DPP for Northern Ireland, Sir Barry Shaw, is a man of matchless integrity and when a Minister says "integrity" for the third time in one speech you know he's in trouble. At which point, galloping up to the rescue comes, not the pure Sir Bevis nor the sexy Sir Lancelot, but Sir Percival, the total fool. Try to think always of Ken Livingstone hereafter as Sir Percival and there may be some consolation for the afternoon.

There is no point and no merit in calling the Attorney General "an accomplice in the covering up of murder" and then refusing four chances of climbing down unless you mean, coolly and with malice aforethought, to get yourself named, debated over, suspended and straight into the headlines of newspapers not unsympathetic to the Conservative cause. Labour with an excellent case, which must nevertheless be put so as to admit no favour to the IRA, saw argument brought to an end, the captive balloon soar high and away, while Livingstone, whom the parliamentary party need the way they need measles or any other childhood disorder, got his futile, ego-tripping headline.

It doesn't get the government out of the consequences of an astonishing decision, defended on the grounds of Sir Barry Shaw's integrity and the "national interest", to concede grave misconduct and not prosecute. The most potent point came from Mr Mallon, whose steely precision grows effective. How, indeed, are the constitutional Catholics and Nationalists to carry conviction back home when the law would appear one-eyed and partial towards Protestants in uniform? What recourse is there against what he properly called "the darker elements of the RUC"? What defence, for that matter, does the government have to the insistings of Sir John Hermon, if that is where we should be looking?

As Simon Hughes put it, we have witnessed "a silent decision". That it should be wrapped up in all the philacteries and jungle vouchers of "security" and "the national interest" merely induces feline hilarity. Whatever the Attorney General for grave reasons of national importance declines to tell us, thereof we shall remain incredulous.

However, there were mercifully lighter matters, if you consider a diminution of regional aid light. I have never shared the Ken Clarke-for-next-Prime-Minister-but-one theory of government. Mr Clarke is, by his lights, a pleasant, good-tempered character and one who, to his eternal glory, does not go without breakfast and lunch, take three-mile runs or climb rocks (the principal disqualifications of Paddy Ashdown).

But his affable knock-you-down manner has always had its share of proof by velocity; and for me likeability has never converted into credibility. Moreover, try explaining to a sceptical House (people on both sides) that the ending of an automatic grant to the regions and the substitution of a non-automatic one will not diminish investment and you have a problem all right.

The question was — Will there be more or less money available when the present grants are fully phased out and the selective system fully substituted? No one seriously thinks so, certainly not Mr Leon Brittan who had a gorgeous afternoon going over Mr Clarke's figures and saying "Garn". "Ah yes, the White Paper rolls three years' figures together. Those are tricks I learnt at the Treasury". It is always enlightening to hear former ministers of any stature. They are ten paces away from prefects' rules and the national interest and they know how the milk is watered. Catch them in a good mood and they will tell.

HOWEVER, it was also a superb day for Tony Blair. This is the sort of young man who will figure at the very front of any potential Labour revival. His style is exactly right, briefed and expert, but comprehensively unpompous, on top of the numbers but not wearying us with them and, in personal terms, wholly on the attack without a hint of animus. It was a performance as far away from Livingstonism as one is likely to see and it comprehensively did for the minister.

There have been a number of goodish to very good front-bench Labour performances recently, but in this not over-publicised debate, Tony Blair turned in the best performance of the lot. He had a central truth, which Leon Brittan confirmed for him, that an automatic form of regional grant is a guarantee of a measure of investment as no optional system can be.

And he socked it quite admirably to the Prime Minister's line during her hit-and-run progress through the north, one of condescending depatch to oblivion: "My word, how wonderfully you are all doing, you don't *need* any help." "Odd," said Mr Blair, "to be praised on the fifth of the month as the prelude to having our aid cut on the twelfth."

Blair reminded the House, in the teeth of this patronising hooey, that of the 35 areas of greatest deprivation, *all* are north of a line between the Severn and Lincolnshire.

Let me put it neutrally and diagnostically. This is the only way Labour will come back. It involves patience, homework and unsentimental caring. It then catches ministers trying to waltz through the afternoon on statistics as sound and secure as high alumina cement; and, politely, fibre by fibre, it takes them apart. This holds true always supposing that the nation can be distracted from reading about Ken Livingstone in the headlines. □



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# Will the nurses beat the Thatcher review?

***Can sporadically striking nurses hold onto public sympathy long enough to prise more resources out of an overflowing Exchequer?*** **JOLYON JENKINS** ***reports. On p12***

***Julian Le Grand asks the heretical question: do we spend too much on health care?***

John Sturrock/Network

WHEN ISRAELI nurses went on strike in 1986, the government passed a law within a matter of days forcing them to go back to work. When Australian nurses in Victoria went on strike the same year, they stayed out for seven weeks and won almost all their demands. If British nurses voted for an all-out stoppage, even Mrs Thatcher might quail at the vigorous Israeli approach to industrial relations; but could the nurses really expect Australian-style success?

So far, a national nurses' strike is not in prospect. Rather, what has characterised the dispute so far is the ad hoc and particular nature of the discontent: in Scotland, it has been about privatisation; in Manchester, about special duty payments; in London, London weighting. Nurses in each hospital have gathered together bundles of different grievances — with some it is the lack of career structure that rankles; in Guy's, for example, the fact that there isn't a 24-hour canteen has been an irritant. But things could change in April, if the government refuses to fund the pay review body's recommendations; feelings are bound to coalesce around that issue.

To the extent that it's an *unfocused* campaign, it is weak: there is no one demand that the government could actually grant. But its very diffusion is partly a function of a new politicisation of the nursing profession. The ramshackle state of the NHS has become a source of personal anguish. The fact that nurses seem to identify their own interest with that of the NHS is partly the government's fault: for years it has insisted that nurses' pay rises have to come out of the general NHS budget, making nurses feel guilty that they are taking money from patients.

According to Jane Salvage, a nurse turned journalist/academic: "To me it's surprising that nurses are prepared to take action when there hasn't even been a campaign by the union. This hasn't happened before, and there's no question that it has caught the unions on the hop, so that they now have to invent strategies to cope with it." The claims by some newspapers that the whole thing is a Trotskyist conspiracy are plain daft. According to Salvage: "In some areas local Royal College of Nursing convenors and officials are under a lot of pressure from members to produce an effective response and asking, 'Shouldn't we be taking a firmer line?'"

Press analogies with the "Winter of Discontent" of 1978/79 are also plainly spurious. There is no compact between government and unions which is disintegrating, and the manual unions seem to be trying to extricate themselves as soon as is decently possible.

Officially, the RCN, which represents just over half the 500,000 British nurses, has not deviated from its position that striking is unacceptable, though insiders suggest a degree of creeping ambivalence. It seems inevitable that nurses at St Thomas's hospital will be able to collect the 1,000 signatures necessary to get a ballot on the issue. It's foolish to predict these things, but it also seems inevitable that the no-strike policy will be affirmed by a thumping majority, as it was in 1979 and 1982.

Indeed, according to Andrew Cole, deputy editor of *Nursing Times*: "Until two weeks ago I'd have said that their attitude has hardened. There were attempts in 1979 to try to find ways of taking industrial action that stopped short of striking, but it came to nothing." The reward for this non-militancy was the "independent" pay review body for nurses, as Mrs Thatcher emphasised in her *Panorama* interview this week: "We in fact set up the review body for the nurses on the grounds, *specific* grounds, that the Royal College of Nursing had *never* gone on strike!"

Some concession this has proved to be: only once since the body was set up has the government accepted its findings without qualification.

Trevor Clay, the general secretary of the RCN,

## 'Stamping on anger'

NURSES at Guy's hospital in London voted on Monday evening to stage a demonstration on 8 February — but not to go on strike. This was presented in some newspapers as particularly significant — the first climbdown. But as Paul Troth, the only journalist to have witnessed the meeting, reports, the truth was slightly different.

The real reason why nurses didn't vote for strike action is that no such vote took place. The session, a joint meeting of the three big unions, the RCN, NUPE and COHSE, was disorganised and incompetently chaired — and it was not always clear to nurses what motions were being voted on. This chaotic organisation fuelled the nurses' bitterness, and while confusion spread among the speakers a petition was spontaneously generated and passed round calling for the Royal College of Nursing to change rule 12 of its regulatory code which forbids industrial action.

The nurses at Guy's are not as apathetic as they seem. There was a new vehemence in their mood, and this was inadequately expressed in the formal statement presented to the press, who were excluded from the meeting.

There were impassioned pleas to the chair from nurses on the floor to "strike now", and there was an almost unanimous vote in favour of taking part in an escalating programme of "Nursing Action" to begin with the 3 February mass "Day of Action". By a substantial majority they voted to take part in a "Nationally Co-ordinated Programme of Industrial Action" in March if earlier steps were to fail. According to the NUPE leaflet circulated at this meeting this could include as a final step a "mass organised resignation".

Amid shouts of criticism at the chair, and with nurses demanding an immediate ballot for strike action, the meeting closed. Union officials at Guy's have underestimated the strength and depth of grassroots feeling. It will be difficult to contain nurses who told me that "even the union was stamping on anger". ●



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has made it part of his platform to find ways of "unionising" nursing in a professional way. His position is now difficult. In his book *Nurses: Power and Politics* published last year, he wrote that "if the nurses in the UK ever found themselves in a position where their only choice was whether or not to go on strike, then I would take the view that organisationally we had failed. A professional trade union seeks to ensure that its members are never put into that position. It is our task to find alternative techniques." The unfortunate fact is that many nurses do now find themselves in the very position that Clay hoped would never happen. The RCN has, by its general secretary's criterion, failed.

## Recruitment claims

During the two most recent periods of industrial action in the health service, in 1979 and 1982, according to Clay's book, nurses "flocked" to join the RCN. This time round, says the *Daily Mail*, "nurses are showing their disgust at the left-inspired campaign of industrial action by flocking to the no-strike Royal College of Nursing." This isn't quite how the RCN itself sees it. "I actually spoke to the chap on the *Daily Mail*," says their press officer, "and I didn't go as overboard as he did. 'Flocking to' is an exaggeration. As I said to him, it's swings and roundabouts. No doubt we'll lose some members and gain others." Any flocking is bidirectional. Both NUPE and COHSE also report large numbers of enquiries from RCN members who don't like the strikes ban.

The apparent antagonism between the two camps is part shadow boxing, part Mutt and Jeff act. The current balance really suits each side quite well. Clay, for example, was able to warn the Prime Minister last week that problems facing the health service required immediate action if the strikes were to be halted — it was hardly a disinterested action, but it couldn't be portrayed as blackmail (or, in Norman Fowler's picturesque phrase, putting tanks on the streets).

Conversely, NUPE and COHSE can advocate strike action secure in the knowledge that enough RCN members will carry on working to stop hospitals grinding to a halt.

Apart from RCN disapproval, nurses face the prospect that their regulatory body, the UK Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (UKCC), could rule that withdrawing one's labour is a disciplinary offence — which could mean being struck off the register. Reg Pyne, the UKCC's director for professional conduct, says that since the end of last year his office has had an increasing flow of calls from anxious nurses throughout the country wanting to know the official position. The council's interpretation of its code of conduct is that the interests of patients always come before the interests of the nurse and the fact that action is taken collectively makes no difference. It has never been *tested* whether it is misconduct to go on strike, but the UKCC's predecessor body ruled that, *in extremis*, it could actually be in the interests of the patients to do so.

## Nightingale myths

Moreover, the orthodoxy that "nurses don't strike" annoys many NUPE and COHSE members who see it as a blatant rewriting of history. There was a strong tradition of union militancy in the old workhouses and mental asylums — staffed mainly by men — which is as much a part of the health service's heritage as the "Florence Nightingale" school; and it's only comparatively recently that the Nightingale ethos has appeared to get the upper hand.

John Harris/IPL

***"The orthodoxy that "nurses don't strike" annoys many NUPE and COHSE members who see it as a blatant rewriting of history. There was a strong tradition of union militancy in the old workhouses and asylums which is as much a part of the NHS's heritage as Florence Nightingale"***

According to Andrew Cole, "there are hospitals, particularly in the psychiatric sector but also in the general sector, which are dominated by one of the other two unions. In those hospitals I would imagine that if they really went for full-blooded strike action, things would almost come to a halt." All the same, there are only 50,000 psychiatric nurses — about 10 per cent of the total, and they are in an area which is not a priority for the public.

So there are structural reasons which make it hard to envisage an effective all-out strike. What of the more nebulous issue of public sympathy? Though it's something the RCN makes great play of, it has made no serious attempt to measure it. According to Jane Salvage, who is researching the issue, simple opinion polls show nurses to be among the most popular professionals, but qualitative research suggests that this is a knee-jerk reaction: people who have been in hospital are slightly less enthusiastic about the individual nurses they have encountered.

During the Australian strike two years ago, public sympathy stayed at a remarkably high level, despite media hostility, partly because the strike had a charismatic leader in Irene Bolger. The point at issue was that the government had reneged on a promise to restructure salaries to improve the pay of more junior nurses. According to Amanda Tattam, a nurse who was part of the strike: "I went on a march during the fifth week and there were people on the street corners saying: 'You go for it — you go for what you want, girls'." After the fifth week, public support waned, when midwives and nurses working in intensive care units threatened to come out.

Although the strike succeeded, it has soured relations in hospitals between nurses and doctors ever since. (Here, by contrast, relations are not always cordial to start with: junior doctors sometimes feel that they are worse off than nurses but get less sympathy.) The lessons from Australia, according to Tattam, are that a *single* strong union, imaginatively led, can win, but only if it does its utmost to stop people dying — and pushes the argument that people are dying anyway. Here, there are three union leaders with barely an ounce of charisma between them. It doesn't look good. □

*Additional research by Aman Coonar*

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# Defending the NHS

***Mrs Thatcher's health care review will exploit the NHS crisis to encourage the expansion of the private sector.* JULIAN LE GRAND *warns that a too uncritical acceptance of the doctors' demands for extra resources could undermine the defence of the NHS***

IN THE ACRIMONIOUS debate over NHS funding, one assertion has gone almost unchallenged: that too few resources are going into medical care. Professional associations and politicians from the centre and the left use this alleged fact to argue for increased spending on the NHS. The government and its supporters, including right-wing think tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute, use it to argue for the expansion of the private sector; Mrs Thatcher's new review specifically aims to raise extra resources privately.

But are we in fact spending too little? The argument is usually based on two kinds of evidence: "shroud-waving" anecdotes from doctors about babies and others dying due to inadequate facilities, and, a little more scientifically, comparisons of the percentage of national resources that Britain devotes to health care as compared to other countries.

Now the anecdotes undoubtedly reflect genuine human misery and cannot be dismissed. On the other hand, their credibility suffers from the fact that similar stories are wheeled out whenever medical practitioners want extra resources, regardless of the legitimacy of their demands ("wheeled out" literally in one case where a patient at a major London teaching hospital was wheeled on a trolley out onto the pavement to publicise the hospital's need for a particular piece of equipment). In fact, distressing though many of the stories are, they tell us little about the genuine state of the medical services; even if we were to devote our entire gross national product to medical care, some babies would still die who in principle could have been saved, had yet more resources been available.

There is more substance to the argument that, when it comes to the percentage of national resources devoted to medical care, Britain does not do well in comparison with other countries. Recent OECD estimates of the percentage of GDP that goes in health care spending show that Britain spends around 6 per cent, compared with over 7 per cent in Italy, over 8 per cent in West Germany, between 9 and 10 per cent in Sweden and France and nearly 11 per cent in the US. In fact, out of 23 OECD countries, Britain is fourth from bottom, above New Zealand, Portugal and Greece.

But what do these comparisons mean? They measure only the "inputs" into medical care. They say nothing about its "outputs": its effectiveness in improving the health of the people living in the countries concerned. Measuring the effectiveness of medical systems is notoriously difficult; but one thing that can be done relatively easily is to compare broad indicators of the state of a nation's health, such as life expectancy or infant mortality, and see how these relate to the pattern of high and low spenders — say, Britain, France, Italy, Sweden, West Germany and the US.

Of these countries, Britain has the lowest proportion of GDP going to health care, but the highest life expectancy for men (71.4), except for Sweden (73), and has a higher life expectancy for women (77.2) than West Germany (76.8) or Italy (75.9). Although these figures vary over the years, and too much should not be made of the exact rankings, the fact remains that, regardless of how much is spent on medical care, men in most western countries have a life expectancy of just over 70 and women of close to 80 — and Britain is no exception.

> ***'The case for devoting a large part of national resources to medical care is weak in the extreme. This fact is recognised in almost every other developed country, where the focus of concern is on medical overspending rather than underspending'***

Infant mortaility is similar, with Sweden having the lowest rate, the US the highest and Britain around the middle. There is no room for British complacency here — our infant mortality rate actually turned up in 1986. The point is simply that there is no guarantee that increasing the percentage of national income going to medical care will rectify matters.

We find a similar picture if we look at inequality in mortality. The conventional way of measuring this inequality — comparisons of the mortality rates between the different Social Classes — is difficult to apply across countries, because of different definitions of class. But it is possible to take a rather different approach to inequality by simply comparing differences in individual life-spans within each country. I compared these differences for 32 developed countries, and found (perhaps a little surprisingly) that England and Wales were among the countries with the *least* differences, with Scotland and Northern Ireland not far behind (*An international Comparison of Health Inequalities*, LSE Welfare State Programme Discussion Paper No. 16).

Now, mortality is affected by a whole range of factors other than medical care, such as nutrition, smoking habits and so on. Nor is reducing mortality necessarily the be-all and end-all of medical care (although it must surely be a main concern). So we have to be careful about drawing any simple conclusions from these kind of figures about the overall effectiveness of medical resources. But what we can say is that the figures offer no support for the view that increasing the percentage of national resources devoted to medical care will significantly add to people's life-spans.

## Cure worse than disease

Another way of assessing the effectiveness of medical care is to look at the results of controlled trials of different kinds of treatment. Unfortunately, this is often impossible, for — astonishingly — many forms of treatment have not been properly assessed for their effectiveness. Perhaps this is not so surprising, for such trials as have been done are often far from reassuring. A celebrated study of the usefulness of coronary care units found that they either made no difference at all or made things worse. Studies of gastric freezing techniques for duodenal ulcers and the use of corticosteroid treatment for viral hepatitis came to similar conclusions.

In the absence of proper trials, it is difficult precisely to determine the effectiveness of other forms of treatment. But most unbiased experts agree that many — perhaps most — treatments don't really cure. There is little that medicine can do about the major killers, heart disease and cancer. Treatments for the most common forms of cancer, for instance, such as surgery or chemotherapy, usually only temporarily relieve symptoms and at a considerable cost in terms of side effects. Few curative treatments for diseases of the nervous system have been found. There is little that medicine can do about many diseases of bones and joints, including rheumatism and arthritis. And there is no cure in sight for Aids.

Of course, there are treatments whose efficacy has been convincingly established. A classic example is the use of insulin to treat acute-onset diabetes (although controlled trials of some other antidiabetic drugs suggest that they increase the risk of heart attacks). Some antibiotics and some emergency surgery can lead to dramatic health improvements. Organ transplants are both effective and, relative to the alternatives, surprisingly economical in their use of resources. And, even if most other medical care has little curative power, it can alleviate suffering and anxiety. But how much should we spend on a system whose principal function may be simply to provide (an often illusory) reassurance?

Some people will draw the conclusion from this that, instead of pouring resources into curative medicine, we ought to increase spending on preventative medicine, such as health education and screening programmes. Unfortunately, here the situation is equally dismal. Very few health education programmes have been demonstrated to be effective (and those mostly concerned with immunisation in Third World countries). Screening is generally very expensive and often finds as many false cases as true ones, thus wasting

*Cont'd on p.20*



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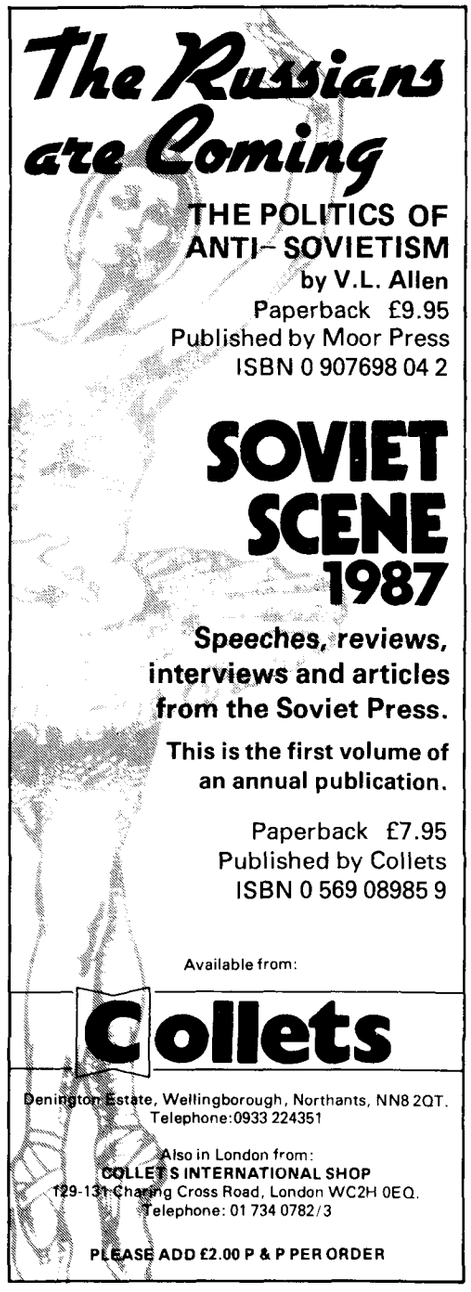

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# The failing un-gentle giant

***Next Monday the DHSS is being taken to court for failing in its statutory duties.* JANE DIBBLIN *reports on a giant public institution which is even nearer to collapse than the NHS. But for once bad news doesn't make news headlines. That's because its customers are poor. And there is worse news to come***

THE DOORS of the Stoke Newington DHSS office open at 9.30am. By 8.45 on a damp, bone-chilling misty January morning over a dozen people are waiting for a ticket to get in. Robert was tenth in the queue and by eleven o'clock he still hasn't been seen. This is the second day he's waited.

Forty-nine people are waiting, too. There are three windows for claimants to talk to staff, but only one is open. There are five babies and toddlers but no space for them to play in the crowded office and the air is full of cigarette smoke. The office has been refurbished recently, with modern utility chairs in red and green, but no thought has been given to the children and their mothers who have to change them, feed them, and entertain them for hours. The babies set each other off crying in a continuous chain reaction of misery. The adults are more used to misery, except for a wizened old man who suddenly yells at the young woman behind the desk that he's never before been treated like this in all his life. The children all cry at once.

Doreen is a single parent with a five-year-old daughter living on £41 a week. Her electricity was cut off in October and she had to ask for help in reconnecting it — the money would be deducted from her weekly income. "When I asked why it was taking so long, the DHSS told me they'd sent the electricity board a giro and it had been sent back. Would you believe that? I told them I couldn't live in the place with my daughter over the winter with no heat and light. So then they stopped my benefit. They said I had to sign on from the address I'm living at."

## Minister: 'It's true'

The DHSS is nearer collapse than the NHS, though its critical condition receives much less public attention. The crisis is worst in the inner cities, where DHSS offices are most badly needed and most under pressure. They simply aren't coping with the huge numbers of claimants; and if Mrs Thatcher's concern about the inner city were more than skin deep, she would embark at once on a crash programme to resuscitate the DHSS service. That would do more than any other single measure to improve the quality of life for the people who live there.

Welfare rights workers around Britain confirm the desperate need for reform. One in Dundee says: "The breakdown of the system, together with the low level of benefits, means that whole families I see are living in one room because they can't afford furniture or heating. And even then they go without food." Richard Wise, editor of the welfare rights magazine *The Adviser*, says that in the West Midlands it was quite usual for it to take five months for a DHSS office to consider an application for a furniture grant. Paul Archer, an Oxford welfare rights worker, says Oxford is under less pressure than the larger cities, but as soon as claimants present a less than straightforward case, they can expect long delays. "I've just had an unemployed man in here who was so desperate waiting for a decision on his money he'd had to sell his fishing gear — and with no work, fishing was the one thing which kept him going."

> ***'Unlike the NHS or state schools, the DHSS is not in practice a universal service. Social security is available to middle-class people, but they rarely need it'***

I spoke to Nicholas Scott, the Minister for Social Security. He agreed: "It's true, we have neglected the state of the DHSS, particularly in some areas of the country."

In Inner London the position is so bad that a highly unusual coalition of the National Association of Citizen's Advice Bureaus, the Child Poverty Action Group and London boroughs — Labour, Alliance (Tower Hamlets, Sutton and Richmond) and Tory (Bromley) — is taking Social Services Secretary John Moore to court for a judicial review of the DHSS's performance. It's the first time that the social security *system* has been challenged in court.

The move is particularly unusual for NACABs, given the service's tradition of discreet lobbying. "We've been talking to ministers for ten years," says Jane Winter, of the CAB's London Welfare Rights Unit, "and this shows the depth of our frustration. We've used up all the normal diplomatic channels; this isn't done without a great deal of worry, because it will obviously make us unpopular."

Their case rests on the fact that claims for benefit must by statute be referred for adjudication "forthwith", and then decided upon within 14 days. They will be bringing evidence to show that a large number of claimants experience delays of weeks or months, particularly for means-tested special needs payments, mobility allowances, help with heating or laundry, allowances for disabled people, and so on. A CAB survey of London DHSS offices found two-thirds had a backlog of claims waiting to be processed; one in four offices were not even open to claimants at times during the normal hours, because of overwork.

Clerkenwell CAB cited a long list of delays: Mrs F applied for money to help buy essential baby equipment when she was pregnant in May 1986; she eventually got the cost of a buggy when her child was a year old. In January 1987, Ms E found she had been being underpaid as a carer of her ill and elderly father for two years: five months, a CAB letter and seven telephone calls later, she was eventually paid the right amount. When Miss F, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, stopped work and claimed benefit it took three months for the DHSS to deal with her request for a heating allowance. So it goes on.

The DHSS's inefficiencies add to the costs of local authorities in London. The average cost of keeping a family in bed and breakfast is £500 a week. When a council offers a family a house, it loses £500 for every week that the DHSS delays in paying money for furniture, plus the unpaid rent on the empty house.

## Security guards

DHSS offices are not only demoralising places for claimants. The staff work behind glass screens because they are the obvious target against which despairing claimants vent frustrations which, at times, spill over into violence. Oxford DHSS offices now employ security guards.

Staff turnover is huge: 100 per cent a year in Bloomsbury, the office which serves the Kings Cross area in London. Scott spoke of one office which has three full-time recruitment staff. The officers whom claimants see behind the screen are young, poorly paid (starting at £4,400 a year) and almost entirely untrained. Nor are they always immune from the prejudices of the wider population. Tess Gill of the National Union of Civil and Public Servants says: "DHSS officers want to provide a service: until they are properly trained and given enough time with the public that is laughable."

Time is indeed of essence: both the union and the CABs recognise that claimants' files get lost ("frequently", in nine out of ten offices in London, say the CABs), letters go unanswered, and it is often impossible to reach offices by telephone because of the sheer pressure of work. Home visits have been cut dramatically (250,000 were abandoned in 1983). Another union official, Judy McKnight, sums up: "Many staff have described the situation as being under siege."

The crisis has uncanny echoes of the NHS's troubles: demoralised workers, inadequate resources, long waits, and dissatisfied consumers, often in desperate need. The roots of distress are plain: the massive rise in unemployment from just over a million in November 1979 to more than 2½ million (or three million, adjusting the figures) last November. Paid work was one of the cornerstones of the welfare state, and it's been blown away. And so the number of people who depend on social security has nearly doubled from just under 4½ million in 1979 to more than eight million.

The ratio of staff to clients has fallen by a quarter over the same period. One of the



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consequences is that decisions are often hasty — and wrong. The chief adjudication officer's 1984-85 report spoke of irregularities in nearly one in four social security decisions. Welfare rights officers report that if their clients challenge a dubious decision they often win on appeal. But it can easily take a year for them to get the money. The area of worst delay — special needs — is not "a nice little extra" for claimants. Linda Bransbury, Hackney Council's welfare rights officer, points out that the messy patchwork of special payments is a lifeline for many — especially long-term unemployed families — as the basic levels of supplementary benefit are simply not geared to long-term support.

## Middle classes don't need it

Why, then, is there scarcely any public outcry from politicians, media or users — about this gross breakdown in service?

Unlike the NHS — or, indeed, state schools — the DHSS is not in practice a universal service. Social security is, of course, available to middle-class people, but they rarely need it. In contrast, the middle classes are major beneficiaries of both the NHS and state education (see Julian Le Grand, *Not only the Poor: the Middle Classes and the Welfare State*, Allen and Unwin 1987). This makes a huge difference in their comparative visibility.

Fran Bennett, of the Child Poverty Action Group, says that the poor lack any political clout; they are ghosts on the landscapes of the inner cities. As the country — and, indeed, individual cities — become increasingly geographically divided between rich and poor, the poor are trapped in islands of deprivation. Those in power can choose not to see or hear them (though MPs' surgeries are inundated with people protesting about social security problems and the homeless sleep on city centre streets). Last November a boat full of claimants and lobbyists sailed up the Thames, docked at Westminster and held a meeting in the House of Commons to give their views on the social security reviews. A mere four MPs — all Labour — came to meet them and only one national newspaper carried a report. "In the 1970s", says Bennett, "we used to get headlines in the popular press about the indignities suffered by people on benefit; but though we put more emphasis on popular education nowadays, we receive less press coverage."

Opinion polls show that public priorities on social security spending favour pensioners and the disabled at the expense of the unemployed (favoured by only 16 per cent) and single parents (7 per cent).

Stigma, too, helps to drown out the voice of the poor. People are not blamed for needing education and (until Edwina Currie took the microphone) politicians did not as a rule blame people for being ill. Nor is there any stigma attached to receiving universal benefits, like child benefit and state penions.

But means-tested benefits — like social security — carry the stigma of poverty; and to be poor in modern Britain is to be inadequate and undeserving. These feelings, irrational though they are, don't only limit public sympathy, they disable the poor themselves from the confident exercise of their rights as citizens.

Not that John Moore has any time for the notion that the poor have rights which should be fulfilled by government. Such rights, for him, are equivalent to a dependence which "in the long run decreases human happiness and reduces human freedom." The role of social security is not to *prevent* poverty, but to give relief in the most extreme cases. Even then, the imperfections of means-tests save money, as the Institute of Directors has pointed out; for them low take-up is a money-saving process (about £2 billion annually goes unclaimed).

The social security budget now forms a third of all public spending, but not much goes on improving the service. New staff have been drafted in — but often to tackle suspected fraud of just £2 million annually. This marks a return not merely to Victorian values, but to a longer established tradition of 16th century legislators, who warned of "divers subtle crafty unlawful games and plays" engaged in by vagrants, rogues and vagabonds.

The Beveridge plan for the welfare state went some way to establishing newer traditions, but the aim of this government is to break the postwar consensus which did carry with it the idea that every citizen had a right to a home, food, warmth, health and education. Moore's predecessor, Norman Fowler, was not blind to the breakdown in DHSS services. His remedy, however, was not to improve services, but to hack away the "special needs" extras which cause much of the trouble — but which also make life on benefit supportable. That's what the new Social Security Act — which comes into force in April this year — is all about.

Britain's social security scheme has always depended on these extra payments. Benefit rates have never been adequate for any but the most basic survival, and cannot cope with unexpected needs (furniture on moving or after a fire) or events (the birth of a baby) nor with long-term necessities (assistance with heating, special diets for the chronically sick, etc). Moore talks airily of allowing people "to achieve things on their own, which is one of the greatest satisfactions life can offer"; in reality, this Act will "decrease human happiness and reduce human freedom".

The big question is: who cares? □


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# Mary, Mary, quite uncontrary

***The campaign for the Alton bill has thrown into relief Christian ideas about the essential docility of women.***

**JOAN SMITH examines their immaculate misconceptions**

THE VIRGIN MARY, you may recall, had very little choice in the matter. Someone turned up, implausibly claiming to be the Angel Gabriel, and announced she was going to have a baby. Understandably surprised, Mary asked the obvious question: since she was still a virgin, how was this supposed to happen? After a singularly vague explanation involving another spectral visitor, this time the Holy Spirit, poor old Mary gave in. "I am the Lord's servant," she said meekly, "as you have spoken, so be it."

The most interesting feature of this affecting little tale, which is related in only one (Luke's) of the four Gospels, is the resignation with which Mary accepted her fate. Perhaps it was because she was poor, not a Roman citizen, and living in a far-flung corner of the empire. Other women of the period — the reign of Augustus — were less inclined to regard the news of an unplanned pregnancy with such stoical resignation.

Abortion was widely practised in Rome and was not illegal in classical law. A great deal of contraceptive advice was also available, ranging from the ineffective (tying a cat's liver to your left ankle, which could have worked only by putting both parties off their stroke) to methods familiar to the 20th century (introducing materials, such as wool soaked in honey, into the vagina as a barrier to conception; there is even some evidence that goat's bladders were used as a rudimentary and expensive form of condom).

If a woman was unlucky and her chosen method failed, she was able to resort to abortion without fear of the criminal law, although her action might constitute grounds for divorce.

It was not until the late second century AD, by which time the Roman empire was going downhill, that abortion became a punishable offence. The penalty was temporary exile; the specific crime was not murder — the foetus never had the status of a person in Roman law — but that the woman had "cheated her husband of children". The situation got progressively worse as Christianity established itself and Byzantium took over from Rome: abortion became an increasingly serious offence, the woman being deemed guilty first of theft, then of theft and murder. By the ninth century, the outlook for the unwillingly pregnant woman was grim.

But it wasn't so, in theory, for the Virgin Mary. Back in the first century BC, abortion was frowned on by stuffy old moralists like Cicero, who fretted (rather like Sir Keith Joseph in the 1970s) about the middle and upper classes failing to breed, but was widely practised. You might think, in fact, that Mary was precisely the sort of person who would avail herself of the services of the local wise woman: single, pregnant in extremely dubious circumstances, and with a fiancé who was doing his best to slide quietly out of his obligations (only an opportune visit from yet another heavenly emissary persuaded him to do his duty).

Instead, Mary simply put up with it. Why? Actually, we don't know that she did. If Mary raised strong objections, it would hardly have suited Luke's purpose to record the fact — the story performs too important a function within the Christian religion to allow any doubts to creep in. The Annunciation gives women a role in what is otherwise a male-dominated tale, and it's one which provides them with a nice, passive example to follow.

Mary is nothing more than a receptacle, a useful vessel, but she will be cherished, admired, and even (in the more Mariolatrous houses of the Christian church) worshipped as long as she stays in line. Her very place in history is contingent on her docility. The story of the Virgin Mary and the angel Gabriel exemplifies women's role as perceived by Christian theology. It is one which is no less biologically determined than that offered by Freud, and it explains the peculiar terms in which abortion is discussed in our supposedly Christian society.

Every time there is an attempt to limit access to abortion or end it altogether — and there have been plenty since the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act — those people who want to change the law suffer a bad attack of the Annunciation Syndrome. It goes like this: "Well, little lady, you can forget all those things you were planning to do with your life over the next few years — you've been chosen, you're going to have a baby! Isn't that nice! Come along now, no moaning, we don't want to hear about you not wanting children just yet, or how you'll lose your job (you won't be needing it anyway, not any more), or how you're living on social security and don't know how to cope, or your husband's run off with another woman — YOU'RE GOING TO BE A MOTHER."

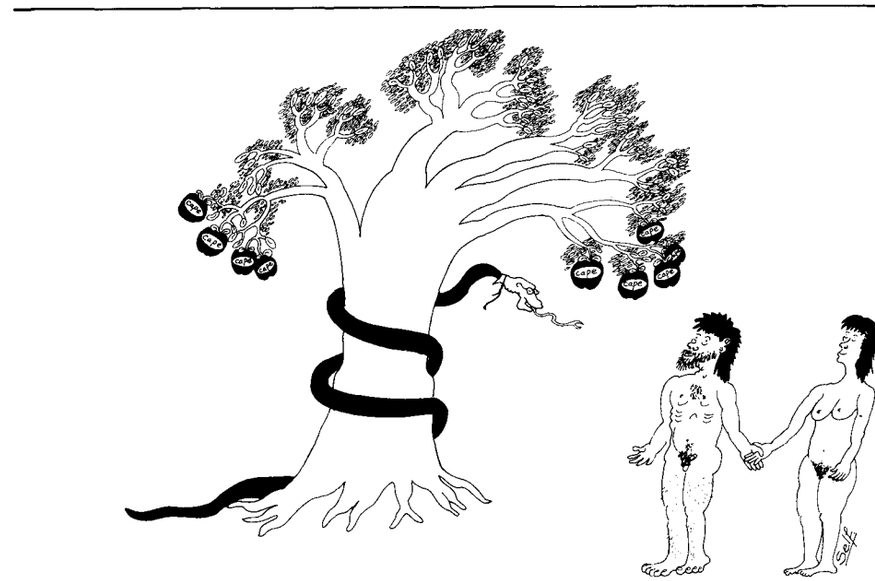
What the anti-abortionists are saying, in essence, is that the act of becoming pregnant, even if unintentional, strips a woman of rights which other people take for granted: the right to plan her life and to establish her own priorities. It is a denial of her status as an independent human being, returning her to a state of childlike subservience in which other people decide what she may and may not do. Her wishes, her desires, her aspirations become conditional; meanwhile the foetus inside her body, a bundle of cells incapable of independent existence and for which, in many cases, she has not accepted responsibility (has even, probably, done everything in her power not to bring into being) is accorded rights which take precedence over hers.

Of course, the argument is not addressed in these terms by the anti-abortion lobby. It suits their purpose in this case to insist on an inalienable right to life, even though at other times — on the question of capital punishment, for instance, or Britain's right to defend itself against the Russians by stockpiling weapons of mass destruction — this same right is explicitly or implicitly denied.

This "right to life" is posed against a list of the "reasons" for which, it is claimed, women seek abortions. During the run-up to the second reading of Alton's bill it was alleged that women frequently demand terminations because they wish to go on exotic holidays or buy glamorous clothes. In those terms, the moral question looks black and white: a child's life weighed against the selfishness and frivolity of its mother. The scenario is, of course, an invention; most women decide to have abortions reluctantly, and with trepidation, as the lesser of two evils.

But it is the Annunciation Syndrome that underlies the anti-abortion lobby's every argument: the premise that members of the female sex are weaker vessels, never quite grown up, who need to have all major choices made for them.

Good old Mary; when Gabriel turned up, she simply accepted that he knew best, at considerable inconvenience to herself. How galling it must be for the anti-abortion lobby that so few of today's women believe in angels. □





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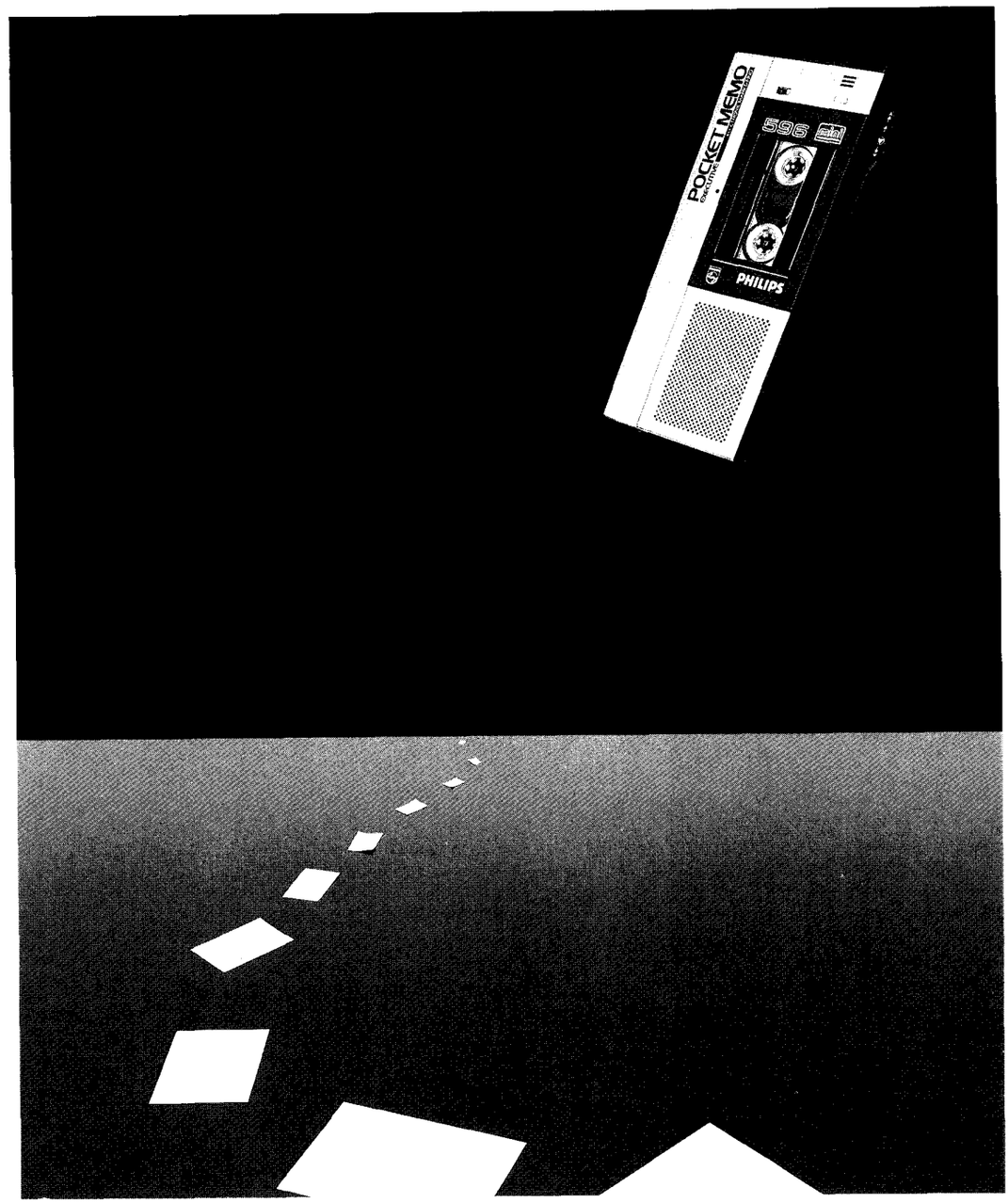


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STATE OF THE NATION

John Rentoul

# Labour could be the new liberal party

WILL LABOUR GAIN from the disarray of the Liberal-SDP Alliance? No, says Professor Ivor Crewe, the Essex University psephologist. The Alliance has slumped in the opinion polls, he says, but the Conservatives have benefited more than Labour. And he reminded us that, with the electoral system the way it is, "a catastrophic Alliance retreat back to the Liberals' traditional Celtic fastnesses would leave the Conservatives with the richer pickings" in terms of seats (*New Society*, 22 January).

I don't agree. According to my calculations, Labour and the Conservatives have shared the net gains from the Alliance Rocky Horror Show almost exactly equally. In the general election, the Alliance won 23 per cent of the vote. Its average level of support in the opinion polls since the election is 15 per cent (the lowest since the founding of the SDP and the forming of the Alliance in 1981); those eight percentage points have gone almost equally to the Conservatives, up four points to an average of 47 per cent, and Labour, up 3.5 per cent at 35 per cent. (Recent polls show Labour doing slightly better.)

This is actually better for Labour than it looks, because Alliance supporters have for some time been biased towards the Tories rather than Labour as their party of second choice. What's more, weaker Alliance supporters are even more pro-Conservative than solid Alliance voters. Thus people who identified with the Alliance, but "not very strongly", preferred the Tories to Labour as a coalition partner by 40 per cent to 17 per cent in the BBC/Gallup 1987 election survey. So we would expect the people most likely to desert the Alliance in its present troubles to split two to one in favour of the Tories — that they haven't is a crumb of comfort for Labour, especially as the electoral economics of prosperity continue to favour the government.

The Ivor Crewes of this world often say that Labour "needs" the Alliance to do well — but not too well — under the present electoral system. But that's really a red herring (or whatever colour the Social and Liberal Democratic Party adopts — have they argued about *that* yet?). It is based on the arithmetic of denying the Conservatives an overall majority, which became the secret best hope of all but the most wildly optimistic Labour stalwarts at the last election.

We all pored over the *Guardian*'s weird multi-coloured chart that looked like one of those really specialist war games for reconstructing the Battle of Blenheim or the Second Battle of Newbury; some of us even sent off for the clear plastic triangular target-finder, and if we could get it the right way up, we could work out what we'd already been told — which was that, with Labour unlikely to get more than 35-36 per cent of the votes, the Alliance needed to get 27 per cent to produce a hung parliament.

That kind of calculation is the stuff of last-minute wishful thinking, not a political strategy for the next 3½ years and longer. Put crudely, Labour needs to win the support both of people who currently support the Alliance and of Tories; once it has done so, it can afford to be quietly pleased if the Alliance starts to take votes away from the Conservatives. But, until then, it needs an Alliance revival like David Steel needs VAT on children's clothes.

HOWEVER, AN ALLIANCE revival is what we are going to get, once the merger has been agreed and Paddy Ashdown has been elected leader. The question that Neil Kinnock must now be pondering is how to take long-term advantage of the Alliance's short-term bout of infighting.

Labour may have done moderately well since last June, but when Neil Kinnock surveys his four years as party leader he must be depressed. He was elected party leader in October 1983, instantly raising the party's standing in the polls from 25 per cent to 37 per cent. "Some time later", as they say in cartoon strips, from March 1985 to October 1986, Labour was consistently in the lead in the opinion polls, although never getting more than 41 per cent. But if we compare his first four months as leader with the past four months (since October 1987), Labour is back where it started: averaging 35 per cent.

> ***Alliance voters tend towards the Tories as their second choice; but of those who feel strongly, twice as many are against the Tories as against Labour***

The *Guardian*'s Marplan poll two weeks ago, putting Labour at 40 per cent, two points behind the Conservatives, may be the start of an NHS factor — looking very much like an action replay of Labour's "Save Our NHS" campaign in late 1983 and early 1984, which also helped lift Labour to around 40 per cent in February and March 1984.

But to bend the cycle of four years ago in its favour, Labour needs to seize the opportunity that it didn't have then of poaching wholesale millions of Alliance voters. We can be certain that the squabbling between the four factions of the Alliance (the pro- and anti-merger wings of both parties) has undermined its general image of "fitness to govern", "unity" and "good leaders" — the usual rather vague reasons electors give for switching their support from party to party.

It is also possible that John Prescott's decision not to stand against Roy Hattersley as Labour's deputy leader has marginally enhanced Labour's scores on the same counts.

But in order to hold onto the converts it has already made and to encourage more Alliance waverers to come over, Labour needs to appeal to the underlying political values that distinguish Alliance supporters from other voters.

SO WHAT ARE the distinctive values of Alliance supporters? The British Social Attitudes survey shows that Alliance supporters are roughly midway between Conservatives and Labour supporters (or closer to the Tories) on most of the issues that affect the way people vote. What marks off Alliance partisans (people who "generally think of themselves as a supporter" of the Alliance) is that they are in favour of the welfare state, although they are not particularly egalitarian; they are "liberal" on issues like hanging; and they want lower defence spending, although they are not in favour of a non-nuclear defence policy (*British Social Attitudes: the 1986 report*, Gower).

The first thing these findings tell us is that Neil Kinnock is quite right, however tedious it gets for the parliamentary press gallery, to go on and on and on about the National Health Service. Someone should also send a memo to two of Labour's policy review groups. The first, to Roy Hattersley and Jo Richardson, convenors of the "Democracy for the Individual and the Community" group, would say: keep banging on about civil liberties. Once the Liberals have merged, Labour could have just as much right to be called "the liberal party" as they have.

Since we were writing to them anyway, we could add in passing that it would do no harm to pre-empt the Social and Liberal Democrats on electoral reform. All it would take would be a modest proposal to have voting in order of preference in local and national elections, instead of the "X-vote" for a single candidate, plus reform of the House of Lords so that voting strengths there reflect national votes.

Labour could go on describing the Alliance's system (Single Transferable Voting with multi-member constituencies) as complex and remote from voters, which it is, and actually look like a modern, reforming party which realised that there was something a bit strange about a parliamentary majority of 100 seats on 42 per cent of the votes.

The second memo, to Tony Clarke of the Post Office workers' union and shadow foreign secretary Gerald Kaufman, convenors of the "Britain in the World" group, would say: keep on emphasising the vast expense of Trident nuclear missiles, and of conventional weapons, for that matter. Since Alliance supporters tend to be anti-nuclear without being unilateral disarmers, Labour could advocate general nuclear disarmament in Europe and promise a referendum on the future of Britain's own nuclear force.

One last figure from the most recent British Social Attitudes survey, in 1986, ought to put heart into Labour's battle for Alliance votes: although Alliance voters have tended towards the Tories as their second choice, they have been unenthusiastic. Twice as many of them (26 per cent) were "very strongly" or "strongly" *against* the Tories as against Labour (13 per cent). □



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EAR THIS

# The sound of bitten tongues

**JEREMY SEABROOK** *heard the voices inside and outside the "Labour Listens" event*

IN SIMULATED NIGHT (for the benefit of the TV cameras) at ten o'cock on a wet Monday morning, the Labour Party began its hearings into its own electoral failings at the Brighton Centre. Indeed, one speaker even referred to the panel of Joan Lestor, Roy Hattersley and Frank Dobson as "the bench". That the morning began with the assertion that the basic principles upon which Labour's hopes for the future of Britain are built are "unchanging and unchangeable" suggested minds somewhat less opening than the welcoming ears.

It is clear that Labour is impressed by its own audacity, claiming that it is the first time a political party has ever said to the people: "Tell us what you think." This prompts the obvious question of who the hell has the party been listening to up to this point; perhaps the noises in its own head.

Joan Lestor admitted afterwards that she had faced the exercise with more apprehension than she feels facing a Labour Party conference, and was gratified to find that the people present — about 200 in all — had been well-behaved. In fact, the tone was a little too self-congratulatory, in the presence of those gulfs that have opened up between Labour and those people whose needs and sufferings it originally came into being to remedy. It is the altered sensibility of those people Labour had come to regard a little too proprietorially as its "own people" that is the real subject of inquiry.

Invitations had gone out to a wide range of organisations in the Brighton area and beyond; and although we didn't hear from the Sussex Angling Society or Brighton Jazz Club, most of those who spoke did so with feeling, some with passion. Those who contributed were mostly sympathetic towards Labour, although critical. It is clear they took the exercise very seriously indeed. There were few overtly hostile towards the party — even the woman from the Chamber of Commerce admitted to having been a former party member. The self-imposed — and not always very well-sustained — vow of silence by the listeners on the podium obviously involved a high degree of self-control; the sound of tongues being bitten was almost audible.

The morning was to have been structured around a number of issues in which people had previously signalled an interest. The first theme, and by far the most extensively discussed, was the National Health Service; many of the testimonies (for that is what it amounted to) were very moving. Nurses, administrators, ancillary workers spoke of decaying services, of the horrors of privatisation. One nurse from Eastbourne eloquently described the way she was washing basins when she should have been caring for patients, and she detailed the cruelties of small private nursing homes for the elderly with only two or three residents — homes not subject to the attention of an over-stretched inspectorate.

Christine Roche

## On safe ground

But the question has to be asked: why had Labour begun on that terrain where it feels most secure? If there really were a desire to hear critical voices, surely these should have concentrated on those issues which have caused the South of England so spectacularly to desert the party. In fact, not only was the NHS given the most time, but from then on the level of offerings became on the whole less powerful and more diffuse: education, local government and, finally, the economy. The last had to be cut short, because there was no opportunity to extend the session; in fact, this last turned into something of a revivalist meeting, with fundamentalists asking about "real socialism", Clause Four, the regeneration of the industrial base. There was nothing on the environment, defence, foreign policy, the Third World. However, some Labour Party members in Brighton, who had been initially indignant that they had been by-passed in the distribution of tickets, said later that they felt the exercise had been fair. They were gratified to hear that so many issues on which they feel strongly had been aired.

Perhaps this was because most people who contributed spoke for interest groups, the majority of which were close to Labour's preoccupations — MIND, the Sussex Association of Youth clubs, pensioners, Surrey Adult Education Service, Adult Literacy Project, Child Poverty Action Group, tenants' associations. Nearly all the speakers were articulate and self-confident, and had come from as far as Southampton, Chichester, Eastbourne, Hastings, East Grinstead and even Croydon — a sweet elderly man with linen gloves and an Austrian



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accent who said sadly that he has been trying to get the Labour Party to listen to him for years.

Perhaps the most positive and consistent piece of advice was that the Labour Party should get on with the business of effective opposition. There was a widespread feeling of exasperation that Labour seems to believe that its electoral revival depends disproportionately upon its supporters not rocking the boat — an inadequate prescription in the presence of the inexhaustible insomniac energies of Mrs Thatcher.

## 'Can't think of anything'

But a cross-section of public opinion it was not, as the briefest excursion outside the centre would have swiftly demonstrated. Most people in Brighton were, of course, unaware that the event was taking place at all. The Labour Party is listening, what would you like them to hear? "Tell them to get their act together, to stop fighting each other"; "I'm not interested": "Fuck off"; most consistently: "I can't think of anything." A number of people felt it would be presumptuous to tell a political party what they feel. "They're too clever for me," said one woman, "I don't know anything about it." "Tell them to find me a place to live/a job"; in other words, to do the impossible. The party of social hope is, it seems, the object of widespread suspicion.

It isn't difficult to see why. The most fundamental question hovered around the whole performance of Labour's durbar at Brighton without ever being articulated. Nearly every speaker was asking for funding, money, resources, finance, "a cash injection". The woman who said she resented the government's disdain in declaring that throwing money at the NHS or the inner cities is not the answer, drew considerable applause; the more so since money seemed to be the panacea for all ills except poverty.

But the underlying doubt was unspoken: if more resources (Labour's euphemism for money) are required before all the brave humanitarian impulses of Labour can be realised, then who is going to believe that Labour is going to make the economy (that euphemism for capitalism) work more efficiently than the Tories? That Labour so long ago tethered its hopes of transformation to that juggernaut is what makes all these dialogues at bottom so melancholy and evasive.

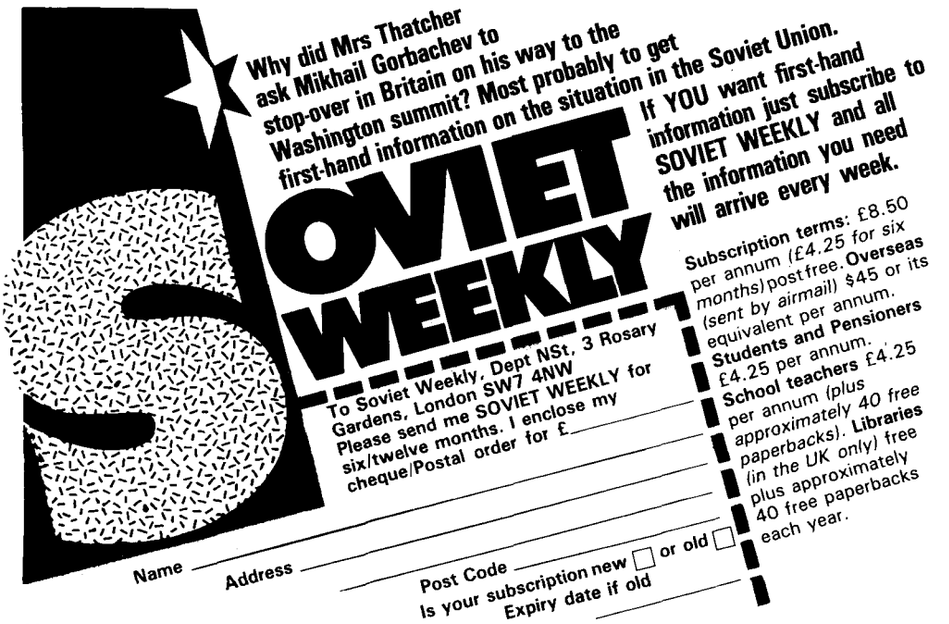
It seems a pity that the meeting had drawn people from so far afield; the more so since Brighton itself is the 37th most deprived borough in Britain, equal to Wigan in the proportion of take-up of free school meals. The cost of living is well above average here, but wages are only 87 per cent of the average. Concentrated pockets of poverty are hidden behind the stuccoed facades of multi-occupied properties, and estates concealed in the folds of the Sussex Downs, only two or three miles from the centre.

In Moulscoomb, for instance, people scarcely believe that Labour is listening. What can you do about it, they ask, who's going to take any notice of me? They feel impotent and depowered, the woman alone with three children for whom a trip into town is a major event, the young people unaware that the National Health Service has the remotest connection with the Labour Party, the man discharged from a psychiatric hospital last year sleeping rough under the pier.

Protest has perhaps become ingrown and not easily detectable to the listening ear. The anguish of people increasingly fettered to free markets is perhaps too subtle a pain for Labour to register: as political debate has narrowed in our time, more and more ideas have slid off an increasingly slippery and tilted agenda.

Everything that Labour hears, we are told, is going to be fed into the continuing policy review. It will inform discussion in the party for many years to come. It will be interesting to monitor the ways in which this exercise colours the future policy statements of Labour, and to see whether this week's event in Brighton was held at ten in the morning to catch the evening news bulletins, for the people to see rather than for Labour to listen.

Perhaps the most encouraging result of the meeting was not the listening at all, but the commitment from Roy Hattersley, in response to a passionate young man from Brighton Aids Helpline, that the infamous clause 28 would be repealed if and when Labour is returned to what it still (perhaps exaggeratedly) calls power. □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more resources and causing needless, but often intense, anxiety.

What all this amounts to is that the case for devoting a large part of national resources to medical care is weak in the extreme. This fact is recognised in almost every other developed country, where the focus of concern is on medical overspending rather than underspending. Britain's relatively small share is thus a cause for celebration, not complaint.

Moreover, much of the credit for this goes to the National Health Service. Contrary to the present government's claims, the NHS is an excellent instrument for curbing wasteful health spending. The fact that medical practitioners are paid on a salary or capitation basis, rather than one of fee-for-service, means that they have no incentive to carry out expensive treatment of dubious value. (This, incidentally, is a feature that particularly impresses visiting American health economists who, imbued with pro-market beliefs, generally come prepared to criticise the NHS but leave singing its praises.)

Together with the NHS's role as an almost monopoly employer, this means that doctors' incomes (and hence their claim on national resources) are kept under control. British doctors earn roughly two-and-a-half times average industrial earnings, compared with five times in the US and over seven times in France. Also, again contrary to general belief, administrative costs in the NHS are very low. An OECD study found them to be about half those of other countries as a proportion of total health spending.

In short, although all systems of medical care are bad, the NHS is probably the least bad. Moreover, many of these advantages would be lost if there were a serious effort to encourage the private sector, which the prime minister's "all options open" internal review is likely to. For this would inevitably lead to an increase in doctors' incomes and other costs, which the NHS would be forced to match. A major expansion of private health care is a recipe for the kind of health care cost explosion that has bedevilled the rest of the developed world.

In the light of all this, is there *any* case for more resources for the NHS? Put another way, what attitude should a future Labour government take towards the proportion of national resources devoted to medical care, on the assumption that its provision remains in the public sector? There are some obvious areas where more money would make a difference. Nurses' pay is one of them, as is the less politically salient issue of ancillary workers' pay.

The fact that the NHS is a monopoly employer has its negative aspects — it can exploit its lower-paid employees as effectively as the higher-paid. And there are unacceptable waiting lists for operations that genuinely improve the quality of life, such as hip joint replacements. But outside these areas, our hypothetical Labour government should be very careful. The drive for more medical resources is in part a self-interested ploy on the part of the medical profession — a group that is no friend of Labour, or indeed historically of the NHS. And for Labour now to go along uncritically with their demands could obscure, and fatally undermine, the NHS's real strength.' □

*Julian Le Grand is Professor of Public Policy at the School for Advanced Urban Studies at the University of Bristol.*



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INTERVIEW

# Glasnost turns upside down

***In Moscow this week the new socialist clubs hold their first historic meeting.* ALEXANDER COCKBURN *talks to Boris Kagarlitsky, a leading activist of the Soviet New Left, about the precarious prospects of a socialist revival in the Soviet Union***

> *"More socialism, and therefore more democracy!" Len Karpinsky,* Moscow News, *March 1987.*

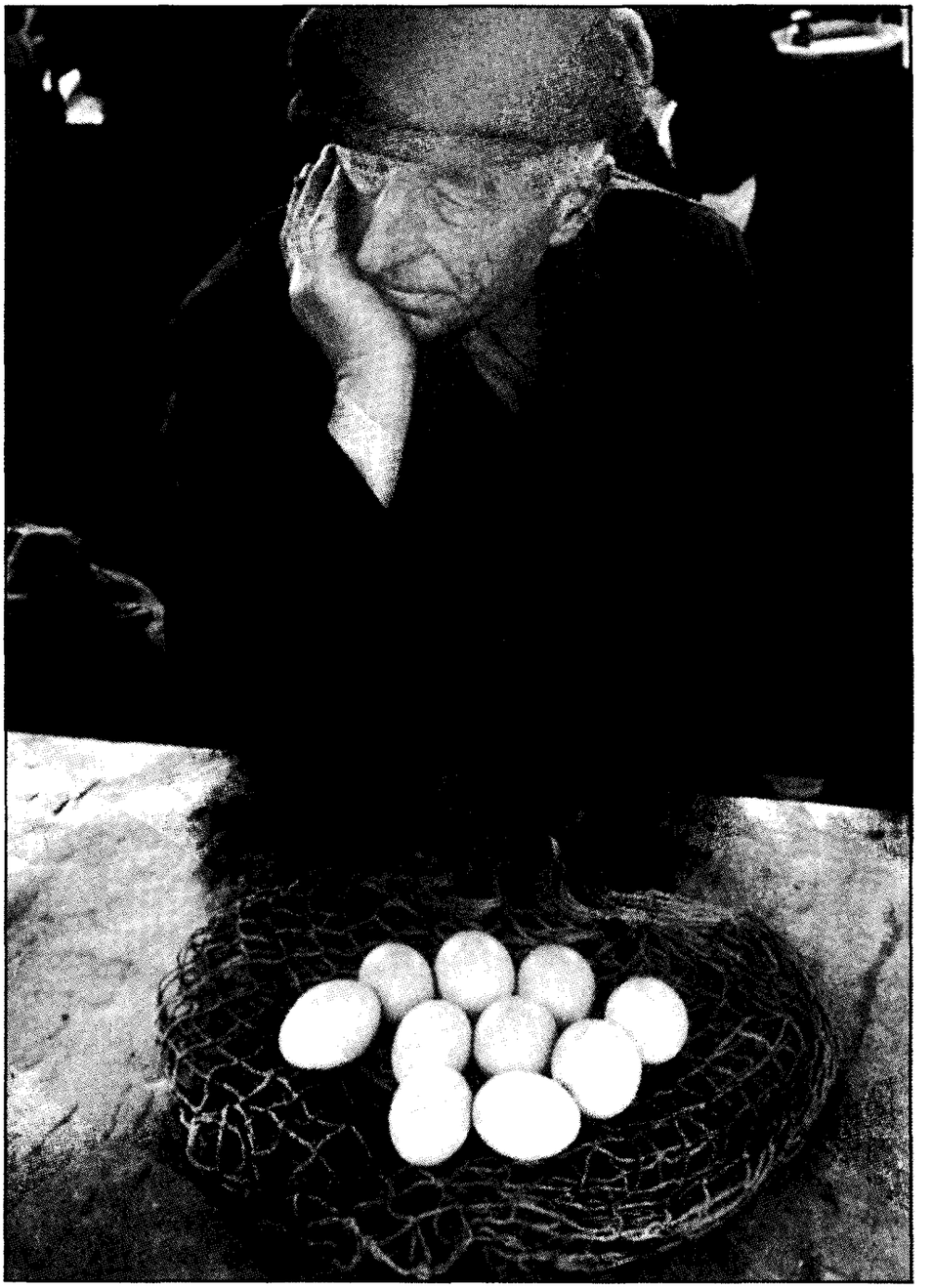
IN MOSCOW this week, under conditions of official sanction that have remained open to doubt until the very moment the participants are brought to order, a momentous gathering is taking place: the first conference of the Federation of Socialist Clubs, which saw its public political birth at the end of last summer.

Back then, between 20 and 23 August in a hall provided by officials of the Moscow branch of the Communist Party, a conference of independent left-wing reformers was held, the first such meeting to be sanctioned in more than 50 years. It brought together about 600 representatives of 50 ecological, cultural and grassroots socialist groups. The proceedings were tumultuous and at the end various associations emerged, among them the Federation of Socialist Clubs, the core bodies being the Club for Social Initiatives (CSI); Obshchina, a student group; and a youth group called the Forest Folk. Also under the Federation's umbrella came such clusters as the Young Communard Internationalists, the Che Guevara Brigade and Red Sails.

Among the leading activists of the Federation is a 29-year-old sociologist called Boris Kagarlitsky. He was jailed in 1982 for advancing Euro-communist notions and released 13 months later under Andropov. His father is an expert on Kipling and Wells, and Boris speaks English fluently.

The intellectual and cultural distance of Kagarlitsky and his comrades from the previous generation of dissidents has already been clear from a long article he published in *New Left Review* in October/November 1987. (His book *The Thinking Reed: Soviet Intellectuals, 1917-82* will be published by Verso on 23 June.) I first talked to Kagarlitsky in Moscow in the fraught days after Mikhail Gorbachev's speech to the Central Committee in November. People were prowling through Gorbachev's speech, trying to gauge the shifts and eddies in the political winds. The affair of Boris Yeltsin, the Moscow party leader, was on every lip. Would he fall, and if so what would that presage?

In those anxious moments Kagarlitsky and his association were active in supporting Yeltsin. They were on the streets collecting signatures in his support; calling for the minutes of the meeting that disgraced him to be made public. Kagarlitsky was frankly pessimistic about the consequences of Yeltsin's dismissal if it came. On the eve of this week's conference we talked again. In what follows we can discern the stance — novel, portentous and precarious — of an emergent socialist revival in the Soviet Union.



**You can't make an omelette without breaking some ideological eggs: Kagarlitsky warns of the dangers of westernising intellectuals ignoring traditional Russian culture. Photo by Aleksandras Matsiyauskas from *Another Russia*, a collection by Daniela Mrazkova and Vladimir Remes, Thames and Hudson £9.95**

**AC:** *It's now nearly three months since Yeltsin's enforced resignation. What changes has his fall produced?*

**BK:** There are contradictory signals. In some ways the situation is not good. We can't get the level of *glasnost* that prevailed before November. It's not that the conservatives are gaining the upper hand, but they are more efficient and active than they were three months ago. But in another way the situation is better, as witness the possibility of this conference.

**AC:** *What are you hoping from your conference?*

**BK:** We want to democratise and formalise the structure of the Federation of Socialist Clubs, and produce a document to be used for its legalisation.



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This is very important. Right now the estate is drafting a law concerning "voluntary organisations" which is actually worse than the existing law, which was promulgated under Stalin in 1932, so you can imagine how bad it is. We want a return to the revolutionary law of 1926, and the conference will be a venue to agitate for that. Also we want to plan practical actions concerning education, prices and so on. Official, or unofficial, either way, it is going forward.

**AC:** *I'd like you to go back now to Gorbachev's speech of 2 November.*

**BK:** It was disappointing. People were waiting for more on Bukharin and something positive about Trotsky. Without saying something about Trotsky's participation in the establishment of Soviet power and the Red Army, you can't have a real history, which is very important in a country where people are crazy about history and are eager to get the empty parts of the past filled in. Trotsky is treated as a criminal for saying something about the peasantry that was really wrong, but Stalin is not treated as a criminal for putting the same outlook into actual practice. The solution should be to say, Trotsky made a lot of mistakes, but Stalin was a criminal. But we have the reverse situation. Another thing, there's an anti-semitic campaign that says Trotsky was responsible for all the evils in Soviet history. It would have been important if Gorbachev had said something to counter the anti-semitic arguments of fascist groups. There was one favourable mention of Bukharin, but all the major criticisms of him resurfaced in the speech. All the same, you mustn't say that it was a Gorbachev speech. It was a speech of the Central Committee delivered by Gorbachev. There had been many versions, but the final one was dominated by conservative thinking.

**AC:** *Could you draw a politico-intellectual map of what is going on?*

**BK:** One current that is gaining ground now is the neo-Stalinist one. It's a very real danger that under *perestroika* is becoming much more popular than it was under Brezhnev. Stalinists are trying to become populists. Traditional Stalinism was simply manipulation of the people by bureaucratic means, and propaganda was simply a matter of explaining orders to the people. Now hard-line Stalinism, for the first time in its history, is trying to conquer the hearts and minds of the people.

**AC:** *What is hard-line Stalinism today as a political project?*

**BK:** The Stalinist project states, first, we must re-establish the initial values of the system, not liberalise it, not change it, not democratise it, but recognise that the only way to solve our problems now is to turn back to the initial stage of the system, of the 1930s, to restore the same structures and the same mode of operating inside the structures. Second, as one Stalinist author wrote, we need a whip. That is, to make functionaries and workers more productive, democatic elements in the system should not be nurtured; per contra, some kind of moral terror should be established. Their economic project is simply to limit consumption, to destroy western patterns of consumption, thus to free up resources for the second industrialisation, which means scientific breakthroughs with computers and so forth. What is interesting is that, psychologically and ideologically, these Stalinists have a lot in common with Reagan's neo-conservatives. They're always talking about national pride, traditional values, moral climate, while at the same time urging struggle against subversive external influences, liberal tendencies of an allegedly counterproductive nature. So, psychologically, neo-conservatism is more like Reaganaut neo-conservatism than like old-fashioned Stalinism. Now, that kind of propaganda is very efficient — not among the youth but among the older age groups.

**AC:** *That's a strong intellectual current?*

**BK:** You can't find too many self-respecting intellectuals in this camp, but you do find these ideas at the popular level. Then there is a liberal, westernising current, which, naturally, is better than neo-Stalinism but, all the same, is rather out of touch with reality. It's adherents want to copy western modes of management, thinking, behaviour, without considering how ordinary people would react. They don't think about traditional Russian or Soviet culture. Not ideology but culture. Russian culture is not consumer-oriented or profit-oriented. Even Russian capitalism was inefficient because the capitalists were always more interested in the moral influence they could have on the workers than in the simple business of profit.

Then there is a current called cultural democracy. Those of this mind say they aren't interested in capitalism or socialism. They say, that's not our problem. They say they want free culture; under which system is a matter of indifference.

**AC:** *They don't think about the relations of production?*

**BK:** Not at all. It's a kind of historical liberalism. There's also a current — weakening — of liberal communism of the Twentieth Party Congress genre, which is simply trying to say once again everything said during the Khrushchev period. It's influential among people in their 60s, for whom the Khrushchev period was very important, their shining hour. It has absolutely no influence on youth. There's also a growing nationalist tendency. It's not 100 per cent Stalinist but there is a de facto alliance between the two.

**AC:** *You're talking about Pamyat [the far-right nationalist, anti-Semitic group]?*

**BK:** They're anti-semitic, saying the Jews are responsible for things that go wrong, force them to pay and so on; but the most important thing is that it is based on some feeling of frustration, especially among the petty bureaucracy — engineers, bureaucrats who are underpaid but not qualified for raises. They don't want competition, especially with Jews.

**AC:** *You're 29. What was formative for your generation — people from 25 to 34, say?*

**BK:** What was very important for my generation was the failure of "official dissent", meaning the dissident movement of the sixties and seventies. It failed not only to change anything but also to establish any kind of ideological alternative. People ended up just saying that in principle you can't do everything in this country, so the only thing you can do is criticise it, for reasons of pure criticism — which means recognising that you are a complete failure politically. They were as intolerant as the Stalinists. It became clear that this wasn't the way forward. If you read dissident materials, you find a lot of inverted Stalinists. For example, Stalinists say socialism is what exists in the Soviet Union now; the dissidents said the same thing. No democratic socialism is possible, say the Stalinists. Agreed completely, said the dissidents. So on theoretical points the dissidents agreed 100 per cent with the Stalinists. They simply changed plus to minus, "good" to "bad". When Solzhenitsyn wanted to criticise western left-wingers, he always quoted Stalin.

So an alternative had to be discovered. We began to study Marx and Lenin, and other thinkers like Bukharin. Some people were interested in the role of Trotsky. People suddenly came upon the Gramscian tradition and discovered that there is a whole culture of the western left, as well as eastern European reformism. That was the first stage, which came about ten years ago. Now the problem is not to copy western models of thinking and acting but to find out the Russian way of being a left-winger.

**AC:** *How would you describe the crisis that produced such developments as* glasnost, perestroika *and so on?*

**BK:** Essentially, as the failure of the Brezhnevite historic compromise. Soviet society was never monolithic in the sense required by theories of totalitarianism developed by western Soviet-ologists. The Soviet system always included different social and political tendencies. The problem was, how to balance the different forces within the system? The Brezhnevite compromise was in a sense based on over-exploitation of the country's resources. Every group got its slice.

**AC:** *Not a zero-sum game.*

**BK:** No victims. Russia is resource rich, but there are limits. The Brezhnevite system arrived at its own limits, which accounts for the emergence of *perestroika* even before Brezhnev's death. With the start of the 1980s the limits were evident.

**AC:** *What sort of limits are you talking about?*

**BK:** Money, for example. You can't just print it. I'm not talking merely about salaries but about the costs of running the apparatus and the enterprises. If the enterprises — industries and so on — are losing money, then you have to subsidise them more heavily. And if each enterprise or

## Liberating visions

THIS IS the first in a series of articles about the experience of socialism in the Soviet Union and east Europe, which will focus in the first instance on the response to Gorbachev's reforms. But there is a wider purpose, too. British socialists turn a blind eye to the barbarities committed in socialism's name in these countries — that's got nothing to do with the traditions of *British* socialism, they say smugly.

In denying these realities, they commit two wrongs. First, they neglect the solidarity which is supposed to be at the heart of anyone's socialism. Second, they refuse to learn how to renew theirs. Socialists in east Europe have a new perspective on the relations between the state and civil society, a vision of socialism as a democratic and liberating tendency, which puts Britain's statist socialism to shame.

**Stuart Weir**



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sector wants to expand, and thus acquire more bureaucratic influence, you have to find even more money. So there was a financial crisis.

**AC:** *What does economic reform really add up to?*

**BK:** There are two concepts of economic reform. One is a kind of technocratic imposition of capitalist elements onto the existing system.

**AC:** *Material incentives?*

**BK:** Material incentives are not necessarily capitalist. When you think that human beings are animated *only* by material incentives, that is capitalism. For that matter one could ask, what is the alternative to the material incentives of the westernisers? The major incentive for Russian workers should be more free time.

**AC:** *That reminds me of a West Indian organiser in London, Darcus Howe, who once said to me, "Less work, more leisure."*

**BK:** People should have some say in how much they work. Given the choice, they may not work more but they will work better. The quality of their work will improve tremendously. Free time, incidentally, means a better quality of life, which in itself is much more than a matter of living standards.

**AC:** *What do the technocratic reformers want?*

**BK:** More power to managers, more strength to market forces but without abolishing the system of centralised bureaucratic planning, centralised distribution of resources. They just want to give managers more power in establishing prices for the final product. That's a bureaucratic-capitalist mix. The technocratic conservative faction says, let us do everything we did before, but better — better managers, better computers. One of our people said that these reformers are "serf-owning liberals", as in the nineteenth century. They want some kind of feudal capitalism; that is, manipulative elitism. This means forcing ordinary people to pay for the crisis produced by bureaucratic management. If you don't abolish the central elements of bureaucratic management, the crisis will be reproduced again and again.

**AC:** *And the other currents?*

**BK:** A growing left-wing current expresses the necessity of democratising not only the political system but also the relations of production, giving people more say in decision-making; more possibility for workers to elect their managers and also have direct democracy on the enterprise level. There are a few people in the official groups who support those ideals.

It's strange that the most radical people in the official sphere are culturally oriented. They are not thinking about enterprises and economic reforms. We have generated a lot of papers on the economy, but the intelligentsia is generally more interested in social and cultural problems, thus, surrendering the economic sphere to the conservatives. It's an important point about any cultural radicalism or liberalism. You try to establish cultural hegemony, but when you think you've got somewhere you find, finally,that the decision-making centres are inside the economy and you can't reach them. That's why the socialist club movement is important; we're trying to cross that gap between the socio-cultural and the economic spheres.

**AC:** *On the economic front what thinkers influence your group?*

**BK:** Internationally, some Hungarian economists, like Janos Kornai, though now we consider him to be moving to the right. Many are disappointed with his recent work, but his earlier work, from the fifties, on overcentralisation influenced a lot of people. Also Vladimierz Brus, a Polish professor at Oxford. Some are intereted in Scandinavian social democracy, though whether anything can be learned from that, I should stress that the people looking at Sweden are not social democrats. More broadly, people are very influenced by Marcuse and by Gramsci. Among the members of Obshchina [the student organisation under the Federation of Socialist Clubs], Bakunin is very important. People are information-hungry and seize on any left-wing thought.

**AC:** *So how are you bringing your ideas to bear in the economic sphere?*

**BK:** For example, we've set up a group called the Campaign for Just Prices, trying to show that price rises are not only unnecessary and unjust but also anti-reformist. So, first, give more power in decision-making about prices to the local authorities — since they are more sensitive to market pressures and also to local needs, and will be forced to find a balance between the two forces — but at the same time democratise those local authorities. Second, you need to have differentiated prices functioning as a redistributive force, making richer people subsidise the consumption of those poorer than themselves. That means higher prices for luxury goods, restaurant meals and so on.

So far as distribution is concerned, we must move toward the market, which is the natural framework because it's the only way to establish the sovereignty of the consumer over the producer in the Soviet economy, which is producer-dominated. So in that sense some movement toward the market is needed. But the problem is to accompany that with a movement toward producers' democracy, toward more participation of the people in decision-making, with some redistributive mechanism which should be democratic.

**AC:** *There's a tendency in the west to read all recent Soviet developments in terms of Gorbachev's initiatives, which is surely a naive way of looking at events?*

**BK:** Under Brezhnev there was already some kind of bureaucratic pluralism, and today the power struggle is not more intense than in Brezhnev's last years, but it is more visible, because now we have *glasnost*.

There are bureaucratic institutions and groupings that have different political concepts. It's rather more of an American than a western European type of pluralism. We have a one-party and the Americans a two-party system, but in the sense that interest groups are more important than the formal political machinery, a certain similarity becomes evident. In that way the Soviet system is evolving toward an Americanised system, with much more weight attached to lobbies, political groupings inside the structure, which impose political constraints on the elite. What is truly new is that grassroots left-wing and right-wing tendencies are trying to influence that structure.

**AC:** *So the present plan of the clubs is to develop reinvigorated socialist concepts and try to circulate them?*

**BK:** Yes, and to become a real factor, a real pressure group, in the decision-making process. In local issues the groups can have great effect. With global problems it's not so easy. We've managed to get a lot of people at the official level to accept our role as a pressure group and to recognise that under *perestroika* it is normal for such groups to exist. Even those who don't identify themselves with us see that it's necessary to have forces on the left to counterbalance the right.

**AC:** *What are your hopes for the future? Are you optimistic or pessimistic?*

**BK** *(laughing)*: I should say I'm not completely pessimistic. The balance of forces is moving slightly toward the more conservative end. If you try to change things you always get some kind of polarisation. So the left is growing stronger, as are the extreme right and the conservatives, and the liberal-moderate tendencies are going to be weaker.

**AC:** *Some dialogue between your group and people in western European and US left movements could obviously be important.*

**BK:** Often we are disappointed with the western left. It is pragmatic and de-ideologised, whereas Russian culture is ideological and value oriented. We're interested in the history of the New Left, also in the present peace groupings and the Green movement, because they are also value oriented. Of course, to those Western value-oriented movements the Soviet left-wing groups must seem rather pragmatic, since we must necessarily avoid demagogy and formulate concepts engaging seriously with economic short-comings and contradictions. Value-oriented groups in the west sometimes forget about practical contradictions. In principle we're open to dialogue with the western left. □

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# ARTS

**POP TV**

## All this and less

**Jon Savage**

*The weekend stops here. Thanks to LWT's* Night Network, *you can now sit back and consume until dawn. What's this got to do with youth?*

**Programming by LWT, clothes by Levis, death by boredom: Paul Thompson and Alice Cooper try to keep awake on *Night Network***

IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT and it's one a.m. You turn on Channel 3 and you see a snappy title sequence that says *Night Network*, followed by a three-minute barrage of videos, captions, programme menus, etc., ending with the line "All This And More". Dizzy, you come to earth with a bump when you see the two presenters—cloned chirpy trendies—flanked by a pair of mildly puzzled pop stars. It's time for *Video View*—a sort of pop video *Juke Box Jury*. After a couple of INXS and AC/DC videos, and three or four rapid ad breaks, vertigo begins to set in. Where does the advertising stop? Where does the programming start?

Like TV-am, *Night Network* spices up what is essentially a cheap, studio-based programme with cheap, bought-in programming. Both use *Batman*; *Night Network* adds cut-up gobbets of *Captain Scarlet*, a Gerry Anderson puppet drama from the early '70s which falls the wrong side of camp. A *new* Gerry Anderson show, *Dick Spanner*, was a regular feature on Channel 4's Sunday morning youth marathon, *Network 7*. A similar Gerry Anderson puppet character is now part of an extended Tennant's lager ad campaign, just as an adaptation of the *Captain Scarlet* logo forms part of the *Night Network* titles. Another famous mid-'60s series, *The Prisoner*, appears cut-up into an LBC ad shown many times during *Night Network*'s 1-4 a.m. run.

A further staple is the pop video, used throughout *Night Network* and other "youth shows", like C4/Border's new *APB* and Thames' execrable magazine, *01 For London*. The pop video's frantic intercutting—usually used to dazzle and to disguise a lack of ideas—has had its formal influence: *Night Network* has taken much of its format from *Network 7*, itself developed out of *The Chart Show* and *Max Headroom*. The pop video is not programming but an advert: its influence can be seen in the ads which frame these shows, some of which—if they are music retail ads—actually show the very videos that have just been featured.

Watching most of the current youth TV shows is like watching a closed loop, as empty as the adverts they so resemble. There are several reasons for this. The idea of youth television is intimately related to television's expansion since 1982: firstly through C4's ground-breaking "Youth Programming" department, responsible for *The Tube* and *Whatever You Want*, among many others. For a while, "youth" meant experimental, with interesting results. With the advent of TV-am and BBC Breakfast Time early in 1983, a new type of format had to be developed to fill the massively increased visiontime of three-hour, rolling live shows. After the spectacular failure of "the mission to explain", a suitable format was eventually found in the only other sector to engage with this sprawl: Saturday morning children's TV—where the plugs are indistinguishable from the programming.

The coming on-line of the pop video was important to this new television economy—useful to attract a youth market as, for the first time, TV stations began to think of market research—and *cheap*. Until 1985, TV companies had only to make minimal payments for videos, and even now they are cost-effective, as their comparative lavishness frequently disguises the tackiness of a cold TV studio. Already used on kids' shows, they spread throughout TV-am, cable channels like "Music Box" and, eventually, through C4's youth sector, as the admittedly ailing *Tube* format was replaced by *The Chart Show*. This spread also reflects the increasing connection between the music and TV industries in the new TV economy.

The central problem of TV's expansion has been that revenue from advertising or licence fees hasn't expanded at the same rate. This means the same amount of jam spread over more processed white bread and a consequent lapse in editorial standards. As elsewhere in the media, documentaries and investigations—indeed, almost, any criticism at all—aren't cost-effective, aren't *efficient*.

This has resulted in the ubiquity of the consumer-guide frame throughout Fleet Street and TV. In television terms, it has also meant more market research (almost unknown in the early '80s) and more specific targeting. For instance, out of C4's excellent *Solid Soul* successfully aimed at hardcore soul fans—came the idea of *The Last Resort*, the programme whose success lies in catching and defining the market that advertisers now want.

Here is the reason for all that late '60s/early '70s kitsch now infesting TV. As Jonathan Ross has so winningly demonstrated, youth TV is now not aimed at the classic teenage, 15-24 age group but at 25-40-year-olds—"our" generation, the *real* consumers. *The Last Resort* is a well made entertainment but its influence—like that of *Network 7*—has been baleful, as producers frantically look over each others' shoulders. A camp, ironic sense of TV and pop history have combined to create a self-referential, postmodern form where superficial references and nostalgia-triggers disguise its near total lack of content. This is not TV for youth—as true teenagerdom is no longer an automatic entry into consumerism—but the infantilisation of a generation now coming into power.



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This sort of TV has more to do with a failure to get to grips with the changes in the overall television economy than with any audience's specific desires. As the current events at TV-am demonstrate, deregulation goes hand in hand with a Tory free-market philosophy, where television loses its public service function and editorial content in the search for profit. Yet even so, there's no reason why the result should be as moronic as *Night Network*: C4's recent *After Dark* is a good example of intelligent, open-ended programming. Any future attempt at youth TV should recognise the diversity of the 15-24s, or indeed any age group—and that soon there will be the first post-consumer generation. Indeed, this extreme emphasis on consumption is the historical mark of the postwar baby-boomers and it is one cause of that generation's current failure to resist free-market pressures. □

**ART**

# Empty vessels

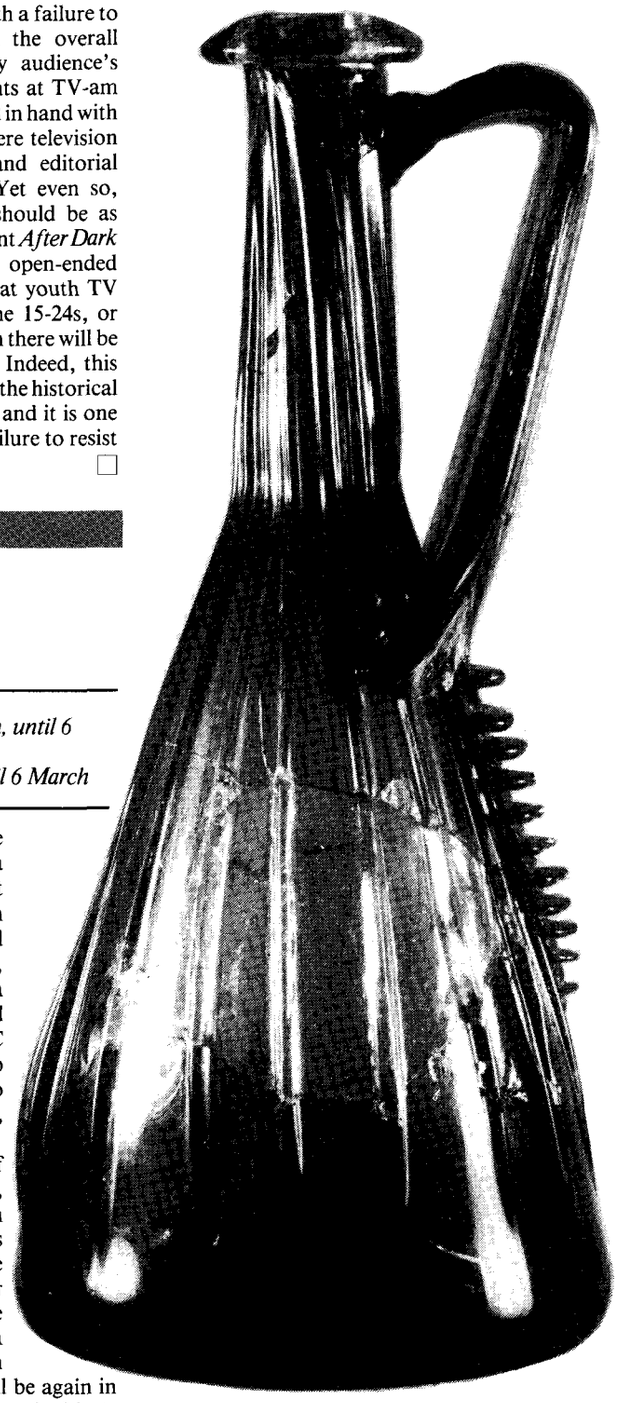
**John Spurling**

**Glass of the Caesars** *British Museum, until 6 March*
**Vicky** *National Portrait Gallery, until 6 March*

GLASS OF THE CAESARS, like the RA's *Age of Chivalry*, is a publicity title and gives a somewhat false impression. This is not an exhibition of heirlooms handed down through the cast of *I, Claudius*, but a heterogeneous selection from what was made in Rome's Imperial period, between the 1st century BC and the 6th century AD, and dug up since, anywhere from Colchester to Cologne, from Arles to the Adriatic, from Brindisi to the Middle East.

The three leading owners of Roman glass today are the BM itself, New York State's Corning Museum and the Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Cologne. All three have put their best treasures together for this show and, Olivetti being the sponsor, there are also glasses from Italy. Nothing like it has been assembled before or presumably will be again in the foreseeable future, since to move such objects around must be a curator's nightmare. The BM official who fetched the Lycurgus Cup back by air from California told me that he had virtually to fight off the stewardess when he insisted on keeping it on his lap.

Although glass itself was invented long before the Romans (in the 16th century BC), the technique of glass-blowing was not discovered until the beginning of the Roman Imperial period and almost immediately transformed the industry: glass became as popular and widespread in domestic use as pottery or metal. The exhibition begins with impressive examples of the older techniques, especially a tiny cast head of Augustus, a deep blue translucent fish (the lid of a



**Ha-ha-ha, hee-hee-hee/Little brown jug from 1 AD (from a cremation burial in Buckinghamshire, British Museum)**

container) and some extraordinarily complex mosaic bowls, multi-coloured, laced, ribboned. The cameo glasses, including the BM's Portland Vase and a comparable Amphora from Naples — represent an intermediate stage: they were made by casting, cutting and polishing, but their elaborate cameo decoration probably involved some blowing. Most of the exhibits, however, are blown glasses in an astonishing variety of shapes, colours and decorative motifs. They range from an austere, almost modernistic bucket-shaped bowl overlaid with delicate snake- and leaf-patterns; to sporting cups depicting named charioteers and gladiators in relief: to surrealistic, helmet-shaped dropper-flasks found in Cologne (did they once contain the *eau*?); to clear vessels, cut or engraved; to a sturdy blue cup and elegant amber jug signed by the master-glassmaker Ennion; to the magical Lycurgus Cup which must be seen to be believed.

The story of the death of King Lycurgus, strangled in a vine for his enmity to the wine-god Dionysus, is depicted in an open-work frieze, the figures being the whole height of the cup (about 6½ inches). The glass is a sickly opaque green when the light shines on it and fiery red when the light shines through: it makes you feel drunk just to look at it and perhaps if the BM official (like Perseus travelling with Medusa's head) had simply taken it out of its wrappings and flashed it at the officious stewardess, he'd have had no further trouble. It was first heard of in 1845, acquired from Lord Rothschild by the BM in 1958 and made in the 4th century AD "perhaps for ritual use in pagan circles", as one commentator suggests. If it hasn't already figured in a novel by Angus Wilson or Iris Murdoch, it certainly should.

The exhibition's catalogue (Olivetti, £19.50) is comprehensively illustrated in colour, but the main text by Donald B. Harden is written in the most unreadable scholastic prose I've ever come across: dense, mushy and stifling, it's like sinking into a bog with a wet blanket over your head — the very opposite of the crisp, clear, endlessly inventive forms of the glass itself. The BM Society's Bulletin (£1.50) contains much the better guide.

It is perhaps a judgment more on politics and politicians than on **Vicky** himself that the exhibition of his cartoons at the National Portrait Gallery looks such a glum affair. It could have been given less of a hole-and-corner display, but even if it had been, the nature of the subject-matter — these played-out actors in their transient roles as people of power and influence — would still have dragged it down into tawdry triviality. The most memorable image is inevitably that of Douglas-Home and Selwyn Lloyd (who remembers them, though they once filled the front pages with their antics?) in Beckettian dustbins, with the caption from *Endgame*: "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." Time takes away all the bite, so that what might once have drawn blood now seems merely nostalgic: dear old Supermac, crumpled old Adenauer, ram-faced De Gaulle, even sweet little Adolf falling off his chair in astonishment at the smile under the moustache of Mona Lisa Stalin in Stalingrad, 1942.

Victor Weisz escaped to England from Berlin in 1938 and, after carefully studying the strange ways of the British, became the *News Chronicle*'s staff cartoonist from 1941 to 1955. Then he moved to the *Daily Mirror* and finally to the *Evening Standard*, but his longest association, through the '50s and '60s until his suicide in 1966, was with the *New Statesman* and it is no doubt his sharp series of *NS* caricatures of eminences such as Edith Sitwell, Evelyn Waugh and Clement Attlee which have lasted best. Perhaps he studied the British too well: their cosy, shuffling, compromising kind of politics is not the stuff of great satire. Or perhaps he lived in the wrong age, when the essential viciousness of power, even in a damp climate, was not fully exposed. □



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## CINEMA

# Dirty linen

**Judith Williamson**

**Sammy and Rosie Get Laid** (18)
*Lumiere, Screen on the Hill, Gate*

SAMMY AND ROSIE GET LAID couldn't have had better publicity than that provided by Norman Stone's by now notorious article in the *Sunday Times,* attacking recent oppositional films like *The Last of England, My Beautiful Laundrette, Eat the Rich, Empire State, Business as Usual* and, of course, *Sammy and Rosie* which he specially notes for "general disgustingness".

Stone's dislike of these none too similar films seems to hinge on two main factors: first, their "disgustingness" which in a Jarman film might take the form of explicit sex while in *Empire State* it is the "revolting sadism" of the fight scene where two men tear each other apart; second, their political attacks on the state of Britain under Margaret Thatcher — the only reason a film like *Business as Usual,* which I wouldn't hesitate to take my mother to, can be included in his list.

There have been many considered responses to Norman Stone, including one in the *Guardian* by *Sammy and Rosie's* scriptwriter, Hanif Kureishi. Stone is a prophet of the far right and I need hardly say that politically I align myself with those fending of his hysteria about any film which portrays present day Britain as less than perfect. But while Stone himself is easily dismissed, it is all too easy, as the lines are drawn up around this issue, to dismiss any misgivings one might have about any of these films, for fear of appearing to be on the wrong side. Yet I too found — for example — the level of sadism in *Empire State* disturbing and unnecessary. Kureishi talks in his article about the suppression of criticism in Britain today. But a sad feature of this Britain is precisely the fact that, so busy are those on "our side" attacking/defending themselves against the right, there is precious little real cultural criticism on the left *of its own products.* Since, however, I have no fear of being mistaken for Norman Stone, I will come right out and say that I found *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* an extremely irritating film — and I'll try to explain why.

It is revealing that much of the publicity had centred on Kureishi (his diary of the filming is published by Faber along with the script) because this is yet another British film where the script is all-important and everything else — actors, camera, the lot — is basically there as its vehicle. The very fact that the script is published simultaneously with the film's opening seems a tacit admission of their equal importance. On their last project, *My Beautiful Laundrette,* Kureishi and director Stephen Frears seemed better able to hold at bay this quality of script-self-consciousness; here it runs rampant. The title

## COMMENT

FOR THOSE whose parents couldn't, or wouldn't, pay out for extra tuition, arts education in school used to go like this: one hour a week stirring powdered colours into a brownish sludge (plastic arts), annual rehearsal for the school play (drama), morning hymn singing (music), vague limb undulations in the gym (dance).

For the privileged—or parentally oppressed, depending on your point of view—this basic fare was supplemented by piano, elocution or ballet classes. These private, after-hours activities were sometimes intended as vocational training but far more often were understood to be about social advancement. The purpose of the state-provided arts education was harder to guess. It might have been intended to promote good health, or possibly good school spirit.

Over the last 15 years, however, there has been a profound change of attitude. Its metamorphosis into practice may be patchy—depending, as it must, on the good will of teachers, head teachers, local authorities—but arts educators now generally agree on three points. The first is that their subjects should be rescued from the shadows of PE, English, etc. and considered not as a meaningless frill but a separate and valuable method of learning. The second is that this distinctive type of learning, for so many years pushed aside by the "academic" subjects, shouldn't now be marginalised by the emphasis on "vocational training". The third is that contemporary media (video, photography, film) and contemporary forms (pop, modern dance) should be treated with intelligent respect.

None of these is an esoteric debating-point for the staff-room; the repercussions are enormous. As Kenneth Baker knows perfectly well—as he drives his Great Education Reform Bill (GERBIL) squeaking through Parliament — the facts that children are taught at school may fade from their minds as they leave, but the attitudes and assumptions, the perceptions of themselves and of society, are harder by far to erase. And the arts, as they are beginning to be taught in Leicestershire, Cheshire, Inner London—wherever a local authority fosters the new approach to their teaching—are as much about assumptions and attitudes as anything.

Freer than other subjects from the trammels imposed by examination, they can permit the oblique approach, questioning, heresy, experimentation. Indeed, when well taught, the creative arts precisely *encourage* such behaviour—urging children not vacuously to "express themselves" but to look, listen, think, make connections, then use what expression emerges from this as yet a further process of discovery.

The performing arts, additionally, encourage a physical self-awareness that years of subsequent "assertiveness training" or "interview techniques" cannot replicate. Moreover, they are often reliant on teamwork, on sensitivity to others' intentions, on the communal solving of problems.

Beyond all this, a true understanding of artistic processes, forms and media allows a child more intelligently to engage with the out-of-school world: critically to appreciate not just James Joyce but advertising slogans, not just pop videos but television news. It also gives her or him a chance of intervening in the game — even changing the rules, as to some extent did that newly educated generation which came of age in the '60s.

It should be said that science, maths, even Baker's beloved technology could all be taught so as to encourage questioning and creativity. I think, however, that arts educators have, in the climate of the last 15 years, been right in banding together as guardians of those subjects where such an approach might be, if only through negligence, allowed to develop. And, as the GERBIL began to wriggle its snuffling nose through the bedding straw and the words "core curriculum" whispered their way, not just round Maggie's Little Pet Shop, but out into the wider world, they were right to acquire a sense of urgency — one of whose more visible results has been the Arts Education Forum.

Involving such groups as the National Association for Education in the Arts, the UK Council for Music Education and the National Association for the Teaching of Drama, this three-month-old body has a simple immediate aim: to have injected into the GERBIL, either at Committee or Report stage, a clause requiring the establishment of an arts education council. The hope, less simply, is that such a body would enable arts education, at least, to escape the GERBIL's rigid requirement that education be justified and shaped primarily by market criteria. In other words, the Forum is praying that recent developments in arts education can be saved from Baker's monomania.

And it plans to fight with the Secretary of State's choice of weapons — parents and employers — the latter of whom could be more enthusiastic than you'd suppose. In last Sunday's *Observer*, one of the winners of that paper's competition for essays on "how to improve our schools" was written by Andrew Cowie, an employer: "It is assumed," he wrote in his entry "that employers want school leavers to come to them with a specific commercial or industrial training. They don't. Employers want articulate, literate, flexible employees who can be trained in house to meet new skills requirements."

As for parents, the Forum can say only that 60 per cent of those who were asked in a recent survey in Exeter wanted their children's education to extend beyond vocational training: to include self-expression and "personal development", those attributes of a well thought-out arts education. If parent readers of the *NS* feel the same — or, for that matter, non-parent readers, since we all have to live with the results — they might let Kenneth Baker know of their support for the proposed new clause, for a statutory body to protect schools' arts education.

Though I have to say that, even should he listen, I doubt that he or his mistress would allow anything as dangerous to flourish in our midst as an education which encouraged and equipped the young to ask difficult questions.

**Harriett Gilbert**



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couple invariably speak as if they know their words come from a controversial scriptwriter: "naughty" lines are delivered with a truculence reminiscent of the pseudo-careless voice children use to swear in when they want to shock their parents.

And it is in the mixing of sexual "daring" with political criticism that the film perfectly fits *both* of Stone's despised categories. But do they necessarily have to go together? It takes a different kind of courage to make political criticisms than it takes to bung in lines about "cunty fingers". Within the plot characters use sex deliberately to shock, as when the obnoxious lesbian couple (are they *meant* to be so creepy?) kiss in front of Sammy's father, Rafi, simply to embarrass him; there is no sense of desire. The film itself seems to employ a similar mechanism: its use of sex is not erotic, but full of its own permissiveness, daring you not to be embarrassed.

The sex scenes would only matter if one cared about the characters. There is some engaging material in the film: the opening sequence when police shoot a black woman in her home, as with Cherry Groce, is the most emotionally shocking sequence in it, but sadly this sinks into a backdrop for the horrible Sammy and Rosie, who live their horrible yuppy lives somewhere around Ladbroke Grove. The heart of the story — raising its key political questions — is the return of Rafi: a freedom-fighter turned dictator in his native Pakistan, fleeing to London, shocked by his son's lifestyle and, ultimately, rejected by his long-left behind suburban lover, Claire Bloom. Bloom, Shashi Kapoor as Rafi, and Roland Gift as Danny — the black itinerant who provides the other characters' rather token link with the urban "underclass" (it is typical of the new leftism that there is no *working class*) provide the film with what warmth it has, even though Claire Bloom is given some ridiculously didactic lines. The rest of the time the characters merely seem to stand for things, so that their interweavings produce complicated socio-political alliances, but you are left wondering if the filmmakers really intended them to appear so two-dimensional and cold.

Leaving aside right-wing paranoias, I think negative responses to the film partly arise from the fact that *two* kinds of bleakness are present, mixed up together: the bleakness of "Thatcher's Britain", which the film vehemently attacks, but also the matching bleakness of its own sensibility. It *tells* us things, but it cannot make us feel them: lines like "the city is a mass of fascination" and "what is going to happen to all that beauty?" shouldn't be necessary because the film should be able to evoke beauty, fascination and the sense of their loss by means of its own imagery and narrative structure. That its coldness is not fully intentional is clear from the fact that its narrative ploys don't work. As bulldozers move in to crush Danny's and his friends' homes, the film cuts to the faces of Sammy and Rosie as if to evoke feeling. But the characters seem so empty that there is none.

This is a film standing on important territory, confronting important issues, and trying to say important things. But its supreme failure *as* a film is that, frankly, I don't give a damn whether Sammy and Rosie get laid. □

**TELEVISION**

# Going down, down

**Hugo Williams**

I WONDER, was it any comfort to sufferers from depression — "dust in the blood" as Robert Lowell called it — that Jeremy Taylor, writer and producer of *Playing with Madness* on **Horizon** (BBC2) thinks it possible that their affliction may have some sort of genetic purpose going for it: something to do with art, or leadership, or was it suicide?

"Many depressives are creative," says Taylor. "Is it in spite of their illness — or because of it? And what has madness to do with poetry, art, music, literature and leadership?" What indeed? Taylor's idea seemed to be that art happens when depression lifts; how come lots of people only write when they're depressed?

"Maybe evolution is playing with madness," he suggested. Okay, but maybe it isn't. It looked as if he was trying to put a human face on the "black dog" (Lowell again), or was required to talk determinist twaddle because God watches BBC2 and the show is repeated on Sundays. After all, TV makes sense of our lives!

The same sort of willed positivism was evident in another bummer last week, *Invisible Wounds* on **Antenna** (BBC2). The sentiments expressed seemed to remind us that science is little more than a cluster of metaphors for describing what will always remain unknown: "Scientists are now discovering chemical 'cross-talk' between the brain, hormones and cells in the body's immune system. Could changing our mental outlook conquer the common cold and even cancer?" Well, it could if it could.

Once Karl, Jim and Taff, extreme post-Falklands battle-stress victims, discover that they are not alone in their hell of suicidal urges and aggression, they feel much better and we are half-way towards being able to turn their chilling psychoses into entertainment: attempted suicide Karl Kirby in particular has a compelling Heathcliffean charisma about him at the self-help session. Taff Thomas actually went deaf and blind rather than see or hear his Falklands nightmares any more. Now, by making therapeutic collages, he is learning to accept them. I wonder, do Soviet mental institutions encourage patients to "think their way out of illness"?

If stress undermines the health of a fit soldier, it is nothing less than poison to the PWA (person with Aids). The second of the **Aids Now** documentaries, *City in Crisis* (C4), took my breath away. For the first time we got a whiff of the holocaust that is settling over New York, where 100,000 have Aids-related illnesses. Aids is now the leading cause of death in men under 45 and one in 61 babies are born with the disease. Some ghettoes actually face extinction. ▷

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PWA Donald Bitticks, brave as a lion, as so many are, took us on a conducted tour of the home front. "We had this 'Ready for the '80s' party in 1980. It seems hopelessly naive now. You assume unless you've heard from someone recently that it's bad news. I've stopped putting black boxes in my address book." He remembered with nostalgia the good old '70s when people came to Manhattan to be part of the gay community. "It seemed that all the gay people in the world would walk down Christopher St and most of us wanted to be there. You'd meet and enjoy a few rounds with different people. There seemed to be myriad possibilities . . ." How right he proved to be. The Christopher St Hotel, once a gay paradise, is now a hostel for 600 homeless PWAs; meals are served in what used to be the cocktail lounge. "I feel it as an honour to be part of this historical event," said a man who had been thrown out of his accommodation. "But if we had known about it ten or even five years ago, we might have . . ." Well, thanks to people like him, we now do. What's that Bowie tune? "We've got five years . . ." I always wondered why it sent a shiver down my spine.

**Sweet As You Are** on Screen Two (BBC2) was a sort of *Fatal Attraction* with Aids playing the part of Glenn Close instead of vice versa. It reminded us that nobody is safe and that statistics do not function in this no-man's land. The film opens with the same elegiac caressing of family comforts that warned us of disaster in *FA*, then a pink card with "sorry" on it arrives from the Praed St Clinic and the bottom drops out of one cosy little academic existence.

From there on in the film is an accelerated two-hander of shock, reaction and change, all done with the familiar super-real TV acting style of performers at the top of their profession and form. Miranda Richardson's face, as she confronts her fate, is a palimpsest of cancelled kindnesses and self-contradictions. Her husband is teaching a course on South American politics and feels as though he too has been physically "disappeared". She cuts out all the rape and "male damage" stories from a single day's tabloids and quizzes him remorselessly about his fatal infidelity; he puts a bag over his head, a Chilean torture device. Later he confesses to her that any man would willingly fuck a woman with a bag over her head if he thought he could get away with it. "The hole formed by the collapsing egg chamber," goes a voice on the telly being watched by their daughter, "makes it difficult for the little turtles to climb out." And so on. There is a brilliant super-real recreation of a VD clinic — "No. 10466 to the grey door", etc. — and the whole thing is acted with a kind of VHF exactitude that causes almost physical pain. I sat transfixed, but I was reminded of Jonathan Miller's remarks on **Review** (BBC2) about his production of *Andromache* being an attempt to escape from just this kind of mad, super-naturalism; also of our film critic's admiration (*NS* 22 Jan.) for the economy and "lack of naturalism" of two 1950s films now showing at the Everyman. □

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# Books

Christina Garrido

## FICTION

## Dance of death on a high wire

**Helen Birch**

**Clea and Zeus Divorce**
EMILY PRAGER *Chatto* £10.95

IT TAKES A WHILE to get orientated in Emily Prager's first novel. The opening pages seem to be lost between the glittery high-tech nostalgia of Fellini's *Fred and Ginger* and a tipsy carnivalesque reminiscent of Angela Carter.

Clea and Zeus are a dream couple, a pair of dancer/acrobats who reenact the glorious scenes of myth and their own relationship as TV extravaganza. Together with their bizarre entourage — the Aryan bodyguards, the seven Golden Lieutenants; Mr Lui, communist and one-time poet; their manager, "a landmine in the DMZ of American showbiz"; and Florie, a Xhosa refugee from South Africa who practises witchcraft — they tour the world, glowing with the adulation of millions.

At the beginning of the novel, Clea wants to divorce Zeus and bow out to their public in a final, explosive break-up beamed to the nation on primetime TV. The daughter of an American army general, she has become obsessed with the imminence of nuclear war and is feverishly preparing for survival. It's this tension which pushes the narrative on: will the world end before their marriage does?

As the stage is set for the most tragic performance of a lifetime, Zeus, the fallen god from Rhodesia who "fought for freedom on the wrong side", sits in colonial splendour and stones his guilt with laudanum, while Clea taps into her



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War Room computer and calls up her psychic on the nuclear hotline. It seems an Absurd, self-referential game of life parodying art, or the other way round. But, as the narrative flicks back and forth from '70s New York to Clea and Zeus' first meeting in Addis Abbaba, to Greece, Rhodesia and China, the camera closes in on their spectacular aerial *pas de deux*, reminding us that this is performance of a unique kind: sex as act; war as theatre. Tiny, doll-like Clea is crazed with a kind of fast-forward longing; she's a despotic fantasist who believes that issuing radiation suits and building bunkers can save the world. "There must be a return to innocence," she says to her estranged husband. But even her zeal cannot rescue Zeus from the terminal guilt he carries, remembering the raid on his Rhodesian tobacco farm and the moment, unknown to Clea, when he shot his own mother who danced and sang and paraded in blackface and nappy wig.

The drama of divorce bristling on-screen tears open a web of betrayals. Clea and Zeus' is a "union based on electrochemicals and a spiritual coincidence", founded on little more than the love of the same childhood story and Clea's dream of a shared loss. "Love is always a colonial tragedy," she tells Zeus' sister Ruth, a zoologist who lives among apes. This is love story turned global: romance touching down to the crack of guns on the veld; the sexual sparring of sitcom tuned to grim power struggles as the world threatens to self-destruct.

These links become explicit when Clea's tough Texan mom is told that she has caught leprosy from the armadillos she hunts, stuffs and sells to museums. Leprosy, the wasting disease, the rotting of the body; bodies flayed and slowly eroded by radiation. "It's the end honey," she tells Clea. "The end of the world as we know it." Through Prager's black imagination the American dream of innocence is relocated as survivalist aftermath, found sleeping peaceably in the bunker where Clea hopes flowers might grow. As the climax edges closer, anger subsumes performance: it's "fight turned theater", the splitting of two dream worlds dissolved into newsreel.

The tone of Prager's book is sardonic; here as in her earlier short stories, *A Visit From the Footbinder*, ideas are carefully layered, her images glancing off and contradicting them. The photograh of Zeus' great-grandfather, the pioneer, is "brown and hazy like an old thought"; Clea and her performing cat in their radiation suits look to Zeus "like a nuclear madonna and child". In a recent TV interview, Prager said that the book was about "the marriage of American militarism and Southern African racism", but to read it as political allegory would be crude. Like Clea and Zeus dancing on wires, Prager's novel defies gravity, spinning passion and cynicism and wit into the air and catching them all as neatly as Clea the juggler. □

**FICTION**

# Flaky turbot

**Paul Hallam**

**The Beautiful Room is Empty**
EDMUND WHITE *Picador* £9.95

THE PHENOMENAL SUCCESS of White's *A Boy's Own Story* intrigued me. The marketing strategy and sexy cover-boy helped, but the novel must have touched *some* nerve in readers. Or did it simply succeed through snob appeal? It was certainly sticky and the most memorable line was unintentionally hilarious: "Or is the bad smell inside me, the terrible decaying Camembert of my heart?" (a rhetorical question from its angst-ridden, adolescent hero).

The sequel finds White equally anxious to relate body parts to upmarket consumption. We left *Boy's Own* with the hero giving a blowjob to, then betraying, a prepschool teacher. In *Beautiful Room*, which takes us through ten more years of guilt, therapy and self discovery, he meets a friend, Maria, "glamorous as the smell of Gitanes in wool", her room smelling like the Chanel boutique of a Paris department store. Later his shame over cottaging is lifted in a restaurant by the ecstasy of "flaky turbot, the pale green Pouilly Fumé . . .". A lover's lips are Médoc red; another's testacles are lychee-sized and quite delectable.

If it isn't a brand name, it's a writer or philosopher. The lesbian Maria, an artist of the '50s when Abstract Expressionists "were still beleaguered" and "far from acceptable" (there is a typically long White digression on Abstract Expressionism) is a convert to Aristotelianism, a "lover of stark tenets" like "Can you put that in a nutshell?". Of the hero's lovers, Sean talks Catullus, Fred expounds Herrick, a truck loader is partial to Beethoven and Zweig, whilst Lou prefers Pound and Herbert. Each character has a book and each a musical accompaniment: Brahms, Beethoven, Bartók, Bach unaccompanied cello. This firmly separates them from Philistines, the majority, the "provincial". This is the kind of thing that gives us cultured, nancy writers a bad name.

The writing hasn't improved with the years; it's still flowery, mediaeval. Snow falls with sad, depressing regularity and demands exotic poetry, words like "saltimbanques". It's a world of same-sex knight and lady games and heroic friendships: Maria "crept up on me like the sun, at first just a silvering of the hard pond, a gleam shot through icicles, but at last a patch of blue quarried out of grey cloud". Lovers are forever swept in tempests. The clearly approved friend Maria is a pain; she might enjoy the occasional trip to the greasy spoon but she'll be sure to make a thing of it, finding it quite "adorable". There is no edge. The hero freshens up his appearance and "I now wonder whether my transformation wasn't a capitulation to a dangerous commodity psychology". He agonises over everything. This is no funny, fresh, first-person narrative of adolescence and early youth; many of the more depressing comments are retrospective.

There is an undercurrent of the emerging gay liberation movement. The novel ends, somewhat predictably, with the night of Judy Garland's death when gays resisted the police in the Stonewall Riot. It does make the pleasing suggestion that maybe gays could create the first "funny revolution" as they camp well under pressure. There is much about cottaging (though the "dear reader . . . come with me to the toilet . . . you'll be surprised" approach is off-putting) and camp (though its devotees sound at times as if they've swallowed a gay dictionary and can't stop).

Where the novel really succeeds is in the gay outsider's view of straight American men, whether in the strong, complex portrait of a father, intolerant of other men, obsessively courteous to women, or the account of boys together at a fraternity dinner, their "Voices too loud for indoors", catching the fantasy appeal of "regular guys". In a restaurant the youth wants to thread "myself into the napkins they fingered". White also captures well the way that adolescents can feel nostalgia for youth even while living it.

I'm struggling for compliments, a little guilty for attacking an out gay writer who has introduced many readers to many aspects of the gay world — whether in the novels, the co-authored *The Joy of Gay Sex* or the excellent account of gay America in *States of Desire*. I've kept hoping, novel after novel, that White would write a great gay love story and that his prose would toughen. But I can't take the stifling relation of art to art, "this page is the final print, music added"; lovers, captured like unicorns, seen as marble statues or flutes to pipe on; fiction perceived as a weave, teased by "braiding"; feelings that have "key signatures"

# Pure land

**Gu Cheng trans. John Cayley**

In autumn
there is, on the bright cross-country
road, a covering of blue, glistening birds
and leaves.
All the dry, brittle paper money
drifts in the empty sky
while, before us, great brightness —
sun sharply striking the hat brim —
then no "before us" at all.
Sometimes you can hear the snowflakes
ringing.
There, the mascot of my vehicle
will fall to the earth.

*Gu Cheng was born in 1956 in Beijing; John Cayley's translations and poems have appeared in* Agenda, Poetry Durham, Outposts, Figs, Staple Diet *and* Numbers.



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or chords. At one point the narrator declares that the novel is "more luminous than that object called living". Life seems ultimately relegated, turned into something distasteful. □

## FICTION

# All dressed up . . .

**Boyd Tonkin**

**The Crypto-Amnesia Club**
MICHAEL BRACEWELL *Serpent's Tail* £4.95

ON THE COVER of Michael Bracewell's first novel stands a rapt-looking blonde in a Little Black Number. For once, the packaging captures a truth about the contents. *The Crypto-Amnesia Club* forms a fictional counterpart to the perennial fashion that Alison Lurie calls "dramatic black", which "suggests worldy power and sophistication, often with an undertone of evil or danger." A brief cocktail-dress of a book, it tries to command through enigma, to make of its blankness both a magnet and a hiding-place.

Nothing much happens. Merril, 33 and slowly crucified, manages the eponymous club, a glitzy joint frequented by "pigs, snakes and creeps". Boss of a dive that peddles forgetfulness, he is cursed with memory. What he remembers, chiefly, is an affair with Lisa, a fey and vampish sprite who haunts his nocturnal wanderings across London.

Merril has a problem with ambivalence: towards the cityscape he loathes but lavishly annotates; towards the posers who fill his pockets; most of all, towards his departed lover. The short version of his plight runs like this: "Burn in hell you bitch. I love you."

Catullus said much the same, though with a touch more elegance. Bracewell's super-chic verbal decor masks a traditional set of erotic reflexes. Behind the cracks at media brats, *nouvelle cuisine* and modish brasseries lurks an ancient tale of a fall-guy and a *femme fatale*.

Though it carries an advance plug from *Time Out* as "the London party novel we most look forward to", *The Crypto-Amnesia Club* turns out to be nothing of the kind. Ever the solipsist, Merril scarcely notices other people. Lush melancholia blunts the edge of Bracewell's satire. In place of human contact, his hero reminisces, moving through the city like a disembodied recording angel. After an age of dreamy drifting he meets Lisa one last time in the company of her new sugar-daddy. That's all.

Throughout, Bracewell affects the Urban Grand Style, at once high-flown and streetwise. Lyrical in short bursts, at length it reads as if Virginia Woolf and Martin Amis had had a fight and then wearily sat down to work something out together. You need the novelist's equivalent of perfect pitch to keep this manner up for long. In this world, a girl at a party doesn't get bored; she feels "the strata of tedium gradually widening like glacial chasms across her chest".

In particular, Bracewell ODs on a line of verbal tics that sound smart on first hearing, flash the second time, and tawdry when they hit you yet again. Just one example: Merril thinks of Lisa beside the Thames, "where Elizabeth and Leicester beat oars and not far from where the Palace beat Spurs". Ignore the wonky geography for a moment (does he mean Millwall?) and savour that combination of look-at-me allusion (*The Waste Land*, lines 279-80) and Jack-the-Lad waggery. If you rate that, you'll love the book.

Bracewell also seems to think that an author can smuggle a dud metaphor past the reader's defences by attaching it to a heavy-duty adjective, preferably "emotional": "emotional minefield", "emotional liquidiser", and so on. Beyond these solecisms lies a layer of simple sloppiness: the phrase "amateur mysticism" used twice within ten pages in quite separate contexts, for instance. We're supposed, I assume, to deduce that Merril is a prat. We may not share his creator's evident belief that he's a clever prat.

Some stretches, usually the quietest, still ring true; as in Merril's slow-dawning grasp of the way that lovers, especially those who make untimely exits, burn brighter in the memory than they ever did in the flesh. But a solid novel about loss and rejection would have to sacrifice the tinselly special effects that Bracewell drapes his prose with. A bit like Merril himself, the authorial voice wants to win love by courting admiration, but can't tell the difference between them.

So the hunt for the definitive 1980s clubland novel continues, with Robert Elms' over-hyped contribution still a few months' off. In the meantime, for a satisfying trawl through what this book's blurb calls "the emotional debris of designer London", try Anthony Powell's immaculate *Afternoon Men* (published 1931): a much more *up-to-date* novel than this one. To find something sharp, funny, sensual and sad about the anguish of the glitterati, you'll have to go and see *La Dolce Vita* one more time. □

## FANTASY

# Worlds without ends

**Colin Greenland**

NARRATIVE IS, perhaps, inimical to peace of mind. "Couldn't we just have the beginnings of stories?" pleads Fhumdullah the royal eunuch, in exile in a derelict city. Stories always involve disruption and conflict. Fhumdullah resists the narrative hook. "You can't drag me along forever just because I don't know what's going to happen next," he says. "I'd rather be happy than know."

Complete with a cover featuring languid, pouting sybarites, vine-clad masonry and a turbanned crowd watching a hanging, Ian Dennis's **Bagdad** (Unwin, £2.95) is pastiche Arabian Nights, and very good it is too. Dangling at the end of the rope is the Moderate Man, whose demise sparks an insurrection by the improbably-named Ripe Fruit Party. During the uprising and the flight of the royal household, everyone stops to tell each other stories: the tale of the three caliphs; the tale of the magical golden pipe; the tale of the djinn who went fishing and caught a bottle with a civil servant sealed up inside it.

Funny, fetching, well-measured and occasionally disclosing tracts of lucent symbolism, *Bagdad* is the beginning of a story. It is the first half of *The Prince of Stars in the Cavern of Time*. This is a shame. Either *Bagdad* should be the first of a continuing series (I for one would welcome a volume of this every year), or the whole thing be published at once — which would probably be more popular, considering the weight of print people prefer to carry around these days. As it is, reading *Bagdad* is like finding yourself at an unexpectedly enjoyable party and having to go home early.

When **Daughter of the Bear King** (Headline, £2.95) jolts to a halt in a judder of appendices, it seems not so much an arbitrary editorial curtailment as the author thinking: That's enough, I can stop now. Eleanor Arnason's infrequent short stories have been fine. This is really pretty dreadful. Using the stuff of genre fantasy — the dragons, the demons, the dirigibles — as heraldry in a woman's pyschic odyssey is a good enough idea, good enough for Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*, Josephine Saxton's *The Travails of Jane Saint* and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. But in Arnason's story of Esperance Olson, a large forty-year-old Minneapolitan who discovers she is secretly a mystical bear in another world, the strung marvels are so inert, so unaffecting, we must wonder if her trip was really worth it.

For example: Esperance is swallowed by a squid with the face of her therapist. "Oh ick," is her response. Well, one may giggle. But when it is Esperance's repeated and characteristic response, the cavalcade of weirdies becomes banal. Ten times I made to throw down the book, ten times Arnason stayed my hand with a felicitous absurdity; a vignette, like the fat man of Little Goat Island; a scene of Esperance in the kitchen, drinking coffee with her friend and her daughter. These are perfect.

Wise bears also help save the universe in **The Dragon in the Sword** (Grafton, £6.95) by Michael Moorcock (who in his last book, *Wizardry and Wild Romance*, denounced such anthropomorphic mummery as "Epic Pooh"). Actually this is a pretty decent Moorcock fantasy, quick and light, less ambitious than of late and therefore more successful. The Eternal Champion quests his way from a gigantic wheeled city of overweening pride through rampant forests of paranoia to a showdown with Balarizaaf, Archduke of Chaos. Then he goes home to his 20th-century persona, to his Thamesside flat. It's a formally pleasing ending to an indifferent trilogy begun 30 years ago, which enables Moorcock to deliver his anti-romantic message more clearly than usual, and with a moral pathos that Arnason entirely misses.

**Mort** (Gollancz with Colin Smythe, £10.95) is the fourth book of Terry Pratchett's "Discworld" series, which began as wry spoof sword-and-scorcery but is growing in to some moral pretensions of its own. This one, in which an awkward adolescent finds himself apprenticed to a tall bony man who carries a scythe and consults hourglasses a lot, is only partly good. The material requires a black humour Pratchett is constitutionally too merry to manage; and he keeps repeating jokes, sometimes within a few pages. Pratchett has two publishers but apparently no editor. Wrap 'em up and sell 'em, that's the way.

The fantastic conventions Pratchett is



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ridiculing, all the fatalistic feudal furniture, are so established these days that merely choosing a different epoch to play with guarantees a breath of fresh air. Ellen Kushner's **Swordspoint** (Unwin, £3.95) is not pseudo-mediaeval but pseudo-Augustan. Subtitled "A Melodrama of Manners", it concerns the tangled relations of a frivolous, be-ruffled, conniving aristocracy who seem to subsist entirely on chocolate and oranges in a nameless country that lacks both king and church. If Kushner's society feels oddly miniaturised, it is the effect of losing those two upper storeys. Nor is there much law, nor much of a middle class. What she adds are professional swordsmen, for hire or in private service. They are how the nobility fight their duels, or, if they think no one will see, do their dirty work. But the swordsmen have ethics of their own.

Eighteenth-century European society is a difficult model for a young American to attempt, all nuances and unspoken protocol. Kushner makes a fair if rather pale version of it. Her book is a crime thriller, full of the rococo conspiracies and illusory logic of the genre, but inverted by the paradigm shift of fantasy. For once we know who killed whom and why. What has to be found out is whether it was a crime or not. □

## POETRY

# Fast verse outlets

**Robert Sheppard**

**A Jump Start**
JAMES LASDUN *Secker* £5
**Selling Manhattan**
CAROL ANN DUFFY *Anvil* £4.95
**The Way We Live**
KATHLEEN JAMIE *Bloodaxe* £4.95
**Against Looting**
DAVID CRAIG *Giant Steps* £3
**Autolycus**
DAVID BURNETT *Tragara Press* £7.50

FOR POETS BEGINNING their careers in the Thatcher years, it seems that those ubiquitous poetry competitions, with their demand for a quickly consumable lyric product, have become the basis of their poetics, whatever their politics.

The paradigm of what poetry actually can be has all too often shrunk to that of a device for trumping up anecdotal personal experience into style. Metaphor is applied liberally to reinforce a moral, or so that the reader-consumer-judge can "see" a thing more clearly. All too often the resultant fog of images obscures reality, generates a new poetic diction, which then remains effective only in its own terms. When James Lasdun, for example, has a bride's father at a wedding approach carrying "a champagne bottle smoking like a gun", the judge puts a red tick in the margin for effect, but could quite easily fail to truly sense the menace.

Formally, Lasdun's **A Jump Start** makes no concession to a contemporary slackening of rhyme and metre, nor, beyond gin-and-tonics and oyster bars, does it concede much to the contemporary world. In "Buying a Dress", an

**Regrettable ways of recalling the '60s fall under two broad headings. There's the ever-popular disparaging approach — the '68 generation led directly to Thatcher; Smithfield meat-porters marching for Enoch Powell were as significant as May in Paris — you know the sort of thing. First in line here was *The Times*, whose mindless leader on New Year's Day included the following piece of historiography: "1968 saw among much of the Western educated class a decadence and absence of restraint reminiscent of the Weimar Republic. The reason why, unlike Weimar, it did not end in catastrophe was the democratic freedom and economic prosperity created by the system which these educated people were trying to undermine." On the other hand, surprisingly, there are residual pockets of the "It was Grace which allowed us once again to taste, touch, feel and dwell in our own divinity" version, to quote Baba Ram Dass's introduction to FLASHING ON THE SIXTIES (Columbus, £9.95). This is the personal photo album of one Lisa Law, a Californian who bought herself a Nikon F in the mid-'60s and went wherever the moment took her. Mostly it took her to hanging out with Dylan, John Sebastian and David Crosby in his cute suede jacket; later to a few demos, Woodstock and several yogis, until she finally encountered God while on her hands and knees in the garden. Soon after, "our karmic veils once again descended". Didn't they just. Well, I've looked at the '60s from both sides now, and still somehow . . . (Malcolm Imrie)**



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archaic personification can easily displace consciousness of civil disorder.

> Outside the shops,
> Where summer riots were simmering in the heat
> And shoals of gauzy dresses swam the street,
> *Fate*, in a painter's shape, began to dip
> His brush in wet vermilion, letting drip
> Every minute or so one beady gout
> Onto the street below . . .

This rather mock *fin de siècle* touch occurs elsewhere in the book; at times it is as though Ernest Dowson has been assimilated into the sensibility of the early Thom Gunn:

> You foolish girls, so willingly deceived,
> What do you seek, to what ghost of bliss
> Glimpsed beyond silver do you cling? Rose flesh
> Turning to carrion for the next jackal's kiss . . .

Indeed, there are versions of de Lisle, also of Ovid (and Lasdun is not scared of classical reference).

Where the volume is contemporary, of course, is in its use of lyric to delineate and elevate isolated moments of experience, to make them poetically significant, as in the volume's title poem.

> The car was in a slick of mud;
> *You'd better lift me* . . . Overhead an oak
> Sighed, and released a dead leaf from its limbs —
> Down it fluttered as the battery died,
> A dream of impotence —
> She leaned across me, yanked the choke,
> But I couldn't raise a spark . . .

Carol Ann Duffy is the best of these new poets, and her gifts are essentially dramatic in a way that usually avoids the search for the opposite metaphor. There is a real sense of menace in the way that the psychological pervades the social world: reading **Selling Manhattan** provides the disquietening experience of genuine poetry. She can interweave various voices through a poem, and her personae range from a terrified police suspect ("Yes, Officer,/I did. I did and these, your words, admit it") to a psychopath ("*No, don't.* Imagine. One thump did it, then I was on her,/giving her everything I had. Jack the Lad, Ladies' Man"). Additionally, there are original and sensuous love poems, such as "Strange Place", which neatly understates the impossibility of finding a permanent sanctuary for a delicate love ("Love, later,/I will feel homesick for this strange place"). Politics — Scottish and socialist — is made simultaneously dramatic and lyrical:

> *Socialism?*
> *These days?* There's the tree that never grew. *Och, a shower of shites.* There's the bird that never flew.

The Scottishness of this poetry surfaces only occasionally and Duffy, along with Scot Kathleen Jamie in her **The Way We Live**, owes more to English poetry than to the more eclectic imaginative range of MacDiarmid, W.S. Graham or Morgan.

Jamie is the youngest poet here and many of her poems are successful exercises in tailoring her talents to the contemporary paradigm of poetry. For me, though, the outstanding work is a lyric sequence, "Karkoram Highway", which was, in the quaint diction of the blurb, "written on the hoof in the wilds of northern Pakistan". In it, Jamie avoids the necessity neatly to moralise or epithanise experience and concentrates on passing perceptions in process, with a sparing use of metaphor to offset the notational.

David Craig — another Scot, but not a young poet — focuses upon injustice wherever it is found: from nuclear weaponry to the cruelty implicit in eating fresh sea-food. But his nuclear holocaust poems in **Against Looting** do not convince; although he knows that "The words have the glamour/Of the murderous systems that clench round the planet", those words cannot directly confront what lies beyond imagination. When he writes, "Deep in the Tube the prudent and the wise/Are heaped like zyklon'd Jews," what *exactly* is this comparison signifying? Better are his oblique encounters with the machinery of destruction, as in "Air Show", where a bomber suddenly shatters the peace of the countryside.

Doubtless, if he'd been on the hoof along General Zia's tracks, Craig may have had more pointed things to say than Jamie — and yet he is equally at home in dealing with landscapes, as his nature poems, in the best sense of the term, show. While Craig takes risks in terms of subject matter in a way that Lasdun, for example, doesn't, he never allows his radicalism to influence the form of his poetry: alliteration and rhyme hold his meditations firmly in check and metaphor focuses the perceptions; indeed, he has won two poetry competitions. His poems are assimilated to a tradition they might otherwise question.

I suspect David Burnett would never win a poetry competition because he'd never enter one. The quiet modesty of **Autolycus**, a small press publication — all the books here except Lasdun's are published by independent presses — shies away from the bravura gesture or metaphor needed to attract the judges' weary attentions. He is at his most passionate addressing Marina Tsvetaeva or Brecht and contemplating "not man/but the failure of man" as represented by traditional socialist humanism:

> Brecht, you old sinner,
> You liar, I need you.
> You disbelieved too.
> Besides, without fairy tales,
> Who ever is whole or better? □

**BESTIARY**

# The good, the bad and the furry

**Marek Kohn**

**The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age**
HARRIET RITVO *Harvard* £14.95

"THERE ARE CERTAINLY an immense number of animals upon the face of the globe, whose uses are at present unknown to us," acknowledged a 19th-century sporting writer, "and to presume that they are useless would be a kind of blasphemy."

It might just have been permissible for the lilies of the field to toil not nor spin, but the utility of animals to Victorian humanity was an article of faith. By the 19th century, animals in England were no longer directly subject to the rule of law. They were not liable to be hanged for attacking people, or for complicity in bestiality. With the increasing sense that humanity, particularly its European component, was dominant over nature, both the culpability and the autonomy attributed to animals diminished. Domestic animals were merely chattels.

Despite this tendency, however, animals continued to be imbued with moral qualities. There were good animals, like horses and dogs, and there were bad ones, including cats and pigs. Large, threatening animals were invariably bad, with the exception of the lion, a beast frequently contrasted favourably with its cousin the tiger. As one menagerie advertisement put it, "To Pride, to Strength, to Courage, the Lion adds greatness, and sometimes perhaps Clemency, while the Tiger, without provocation is Fierce, without necessity is cruel." On the other hand, the guide to the Royal Menagerie at the Tower of London thought the lion's nobility was pelt-deep: "Physically and morally, he is neither more nor less than a cat . . . with all the guileful and vindictive passions of that faithless tribe."

Another large and wicked creature was the gorilla. The zoologist Richard Owen alleged that it would hoist men into trees and strangle them: "Sheer malignity prompts the animal to this course." Today, thanks to David Attenborough's classic television programmes, the polarity of the gorilla's symbolic meaning has been reversed. Formerly the monstrous anthropoid bogey of the jungle, it is now the gentle, intelligent embodiment of a nature uncorrupted by the traits of humanity.

"Intelligence" was a concept with limited application for 19th-century natural historians. The term "sagacity" was preferred. It defined the mental capacities of animals in terms of their ability to adapt to an environment dominated by humans, and to please the dominant species. There were also subtler indicators of mental capacities. George Romanes rated dogs and anthropoid apes at the 28th level of a 50-point scale, just below the 21 levels reserved for humans. One of the qualities that got them this ranking was a sense of "the ludicrous". It was not accompanied by one of irony.

Harriet Ritvo discusses such broad conceptual issues in the introduction to her assured and attractively-written book. She then proceeds to six chapters that discuss tropes radiating from this central core: stockbreeding, pets, the humane movement, rabies, zoos and hunting. Among the phenomena she describes is the vogue among the wealthy for prize cattle that individually constituted beef mountains, but were of little value to the practical farmer. Purity of line was all-important, despite its eventual deleterious effects, and the *Herd Book* bore a close resemblance to the breeders' own pedigree guide, *Debrett*'s. The professional classes, by contrast, preferred dog and cat fancys, in which individual merit received greater reward.

Class tensions run through all Ritvo's examples. Romanes cited the example of a retriever who made friends with a rat-catcher and his cur, but "cut" them on the appearance of his master, as evidence that dogs understood "the idea of caste". The RSPCA encouraged vigilantes to



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police the dangerous classes, from whom the majority of cruelty case defendants sprang.

The ascription of guilt was also at the heart of the response to rabies: "An epidemiological crisis was interpreted by authorities primarily as a rhetorical occasion — an opportunity to reiterate social understandings." Like cholera and plague, rabies was a "shock" disease that excited especial anxiety and was associated with "disorder, dirt and sin".

*The Field* reported that wild dogs and jackals in India developed it "by indulging" their "polluted appetites" for "carrion in the most advanced stages of putrefaction", to which taste they were "addicted". An English vet speculated that dogs could acquire the disease through exposure to their own excreta. In other words, dogs got rabies by swirling around in a cesspit of their own making. The 1831 Bill to Prevent the Spreading of Canine Madness proposed identity tags and confinement; fairly useless in countering outbreaks, but handy for distinguishing the innocent from the guilty. "In the case of diseases that carried a heavy emotional and moral charge," Ritvo observes, "blame was more important than prevention." □

**SCIENCE**

# Relatively speaking

**Robert M. Young**

**Farewell to Reason**
PAUL FEYERABEND *Verso* £29.95 & £9.95

I HAVE HITHERTO avoided Feyerabend's works. "Everybody knows" that he is a relativist and, since both Stalinists and rationalists are forever accusing me of relativism, I thought I'd give him a miss.

I also thought I wouldn't like his style, which I expected to be impish. He's supposed to believe that "anything goes" in philosophy and science. Indeed, in *Farewell to Reason*, he owns up to this early on: "There is no one 'scientific method', but there is a great deal of opportunism; anything goes — anything, that is, that is liable to advance knowledge as understood by a particular researcher or a research tradition." But later on he says that "'Anything goes' is not a 'principle' I defend, it is a 'principle' forced upon a rationalist who loves principles but who also takes history seriously."

As for relativism, sure enough, he begins by dissecting and persuasively defending it "to show that relativism is reasonable, humane and more widespread than is commonly assumed". We learn later that his own ideas developed by extending the doctrine of artistic relativism: "scientists, too, produce works of art — the difference being that their material is thought, not paint, nor marble, nor metal, nor melodious sound".

Even though he owns up to relativism and to "anything goes", I now regret my abstention. This is a lovely book. Feyerabend's prose is sparkling and his writing is deeply learned. He also has the same free-ranging intrepidity that Noam Chomsky has. He cheerfully plunges into specialist literatures and emerges with convincing conclusions. Readers sometimes need to keep their nerve in some of the technical material; an accessible point will turn up quite soon.

This book is a collection of essays providing a critique of the received view of reason as embodied in neopositivism and its critical heirs — especially Popper, Kuhn and Lakatos. Neopositivism "still clung to the ancient idea that philosophy must provide general standards for knowledge and action and that science and politics can only profit from adopting such standards". Both philosophy and science severed their links with their contexts. "The connection with history was dissolved: the close collaboration between scientific thought and philosophical speculation came to an end; terminology alien to the sciences and problems without scientific relevance took over."

In place of the neopositivist project, Feyerabend would place the celebration of human diversity between and within cultures, including scientific culture. He writes on behalf of immersion in real history and in opposition to a single guide to human knowledge and action. Where the positivists thought that non-scientific traditions had already had their chance, Feyerabend claims that scientific rationality can provide us with no lasting boundary conditions and that it is impossible to provide a theory of science.

In spite of the pretensions of the scientists and the philosophers of science, facts and values are not separable: "values affect not only the *application* of knowledge but our essential ingredients of *knowledge itself*". Nor can values be treated in isolation: "Speaking of *values* is a roundabout way of describing the kind of life one wants to lead or thinks one should lead."

There is an extensive and fascinating discussion of Protagoras, the Sophist, so maligned by Plato. Feyerabend defends the Sophistic epigram, "Man [humanity] is the measure of all things", against Plato's objectivism. Plato was nasty when he gave the Sophists a bad name and they have had few modern defenders (notably Pirsig in *Zen and The Art of Motorcyle Maintenance*). It was in the debate between the Sophists and the writings of Plato and Aristotle that the problems posed by expert knowledge were first extensively discussed. It is therefore an important topic for Feyerabend. The aims of experts are not above those of society. "They may overflow with concern for their fellow human-beings, they may speak of 'truth', 'reason', 'objectivity', even of 'liberty', but what they really want is the power to reshape the world in their own image." Experts "are just as confused about fundamental matters as those they are supposed to advise and the variety of their suggestions is at least as large as the variety implicit in public opinion". It is, he thinks, very dangerous indeed to allow the scientists to attempt to provide the foundations of culture rather than merely to contribute to culture. The reality which ordinary people define and defend may be more important than reality as defined by scientists. Ordinary people "may decide to stabilise the qualitative world of our everyday experience and regard every deviation from it as a step into inhumanity".

What is the political bearing of all this? Why should socialists concern themselves with the philosophy of science? They have done so — just as other political persuasions have — because they seek legitimacy in Reason and in Nature for their projects, programmes and value systems. The left has always had a deep ambivalence about rationality. It has been equated with Progress and Enlightenment, and a scientific basis has been claimed for democratic socialism, Fabianism, orthodox Marxism and Althusserianism. On the other hand, truth has been claimed for irrationalism and varieties of anarchism. If anything, however, Feyerabend is closer to the romanticisation of ordinary people and everyday experience. Somewhere in this mixture lies the possibility of critique — thinking clearly about alternatives without divorcing oneself from values and deep feelings.

His style is occasionally refreshingly rhetorical: "It is time to stop ratiocinating about the lives of people one has never seen, it is time to give up the belief that 'humanity' (what a pretentious generalisation!) can be saved by groups of people shooting the breeze in well-heated offices, it is time to become modest and to approach those who are supposed to profit from one's ideas as an ignoramus in need of instruction, or, if business is concerned, as a beggar and not as heaven's greatest gift to the Poor, the Sick and the Ignorant."

Feyeraband helps us to see that there is no method or system of ideas which is independent of values and ideologies and which will lead us from facts to values: values come first. Custom is the deepest criterion or measure — the ruler in both senses. □

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## Dowry violence

*Barbara Altounyan, London N7*
It is always interesting when male "liberals" attempt to reflect on crucial issues like racism and violence against women — it's like seeing a hoard of timid schoolboys running away because they have just discovered yet another home-truth they'd rather not have to cope with.

I am referring to Neil Berry's piece (*NS* 15 Jan.) in which he writes off Radio Four's *Today* programme's item on "gender abortions" and the *Observer*'s piece on violence against Asian women at the hands of husbands and in-laws when insufficient dowries have been produced.

The most intrinsic mistake in Berry's article is his basic assumption that to report on dowry violence is somehow racist and that therefore this "sensitive" issue is better left unreported. While there is no doubt that racists will draw their own conclusions, can anyone seriously argue that Asian women should therefore suffer in silence?

Berry's second apparent assumption is that because the act of dowry-giving in India (and therefore the violence that follows) is so embedded in Asian tradition it should therefore be forgiven or simply ignored as an imported ethnic ritual westerners should not meddle in. He assumes that it is all part of racism and that as such any intrusion is wholly unacceptable.

By the same argument we might as well defend the practice of female circumcision which is deliberately enforced to ensure, among other things, that sexual desire is minimised. This "ritual" is common in some Arab countries and the operation has been performed in Harley Street. Should we therefore condone this practice because it is ethnic and has taken place for centuries?

Perhaps Berry's piece is suggesting that the issue is too sensitive for the Establishment press to handle. Sadly the black press, for whatever reason, has not reported on dowry violence at all. The largely male-dominated black press and media has only now — after the *Observer* — decided to take it on board.

There is no doubt that violence against Asian women is a major problem. In mainly northern parts of India, hundreds of women every year are doused with petrol and burnt alive because their dowries are not considered big enough.

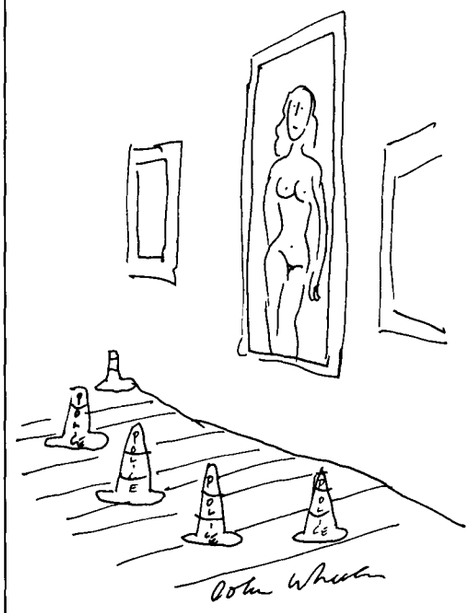
In Britain, the punishment is confined to mental and physical torture. The problem, though widespread here, remains unrecognised and is wholly ignored by the police and social services.

Asian women cannot turn for help to their relatives; even discussing it with close friends can put their lives in danger. Until now they have not approached the media and press. It is therefore a tribute to their great courage that their fears have been overcome for the sake of others. Since the *Observer*'s piece letters have poured in telling of more individual experiences of dowry violence. Must we now ignore their bravery because the "left" hasn't labelled the issue OK yet?

While waiting for that to happen, it is perhaps more important to press those in power, especially the police and social services, not only to recognise the seriousness of the problem but also to consider what action, if any, can be taken. Or are we all too disillusioned to care?

## Anti-porn = anti-sex

*Mary Hayward, Hon. Sec., Campaign against Censorship, Fareham, Hants.*
Chris George and Barbara Rogers appear to think (*NS* 8 Jan.) that "anti-porn feminists" have invented a distinction between pornography and material with artistic or social value which happens to be about sex. On the contrary, this distinction is the basis of the 1959 Obscene Publications Act, an essential document which most anti-porn campaigners have never bothered to study.



The 1959 Act has proved unworkable because, as Colin Byrne indicates (*NS* Christmas issue), the average person (which includes police, customs officials, magistrates and juries) cannot make that distinction. As a result all attempts to alter the law play into the hands of people for whom all sexual material is arousing and all arousal is wrong.

It is very difficult to be anti-porn without being anti-sex and very naive to suppose that under the present government the first targets for prosecution would be heterosexual pornography and not homosexual information or feminist art.

There are already, as Mary Whitehouse regularly points out, hundreds of studies of the "effects" of pornography. All are invalidated by two factors: they depend for their evidence on self-reporting and hindsight and they have pre-determined answers. You do not go looking for links between pornography and sexual violence unless you believe the links are there.

Where have Chris George and Barbara Rogers been for the last 20 years? There has never been a shortage of platforms for "women who hate pornographic representations". It is women like Melissa Benn who have had to struggle against censorship from both left and right and are now beginning to make themselves heard.

## Cheeky

*Judith Williamson, London N19*
Patricia Holland has no idea when my sensibility was formed and it's cheeky of her to assume that she does (Letters 22 Jan). My formative years in the '50s were spent in a semi-detached street full of righteous neighbours. It is not because I don't remember it that the pain has never struck me as comic.

## Abortion debate

*Julia Trubridge, Bexleyheath, Kent*
How your journal can stoop to such cheap/sensational presentation of the abortion question (*NS* 15 Jan) really shocks me — I am deeply disappointed and very angry. It is hard enough to get solid facts over to the public without your journal — of all journals — using such tactics as the photo and the words you printed on the cover.

If you had used a David Alton quote — such as: "I will *force* women to give birth to handicapped children, even if they do not wish to . . ." (*Guardian* 1 Oct. 1987) and some terrible photos of malformed babies, this would have been more to the point, do you not think? Not to mention *the cost* to the taxpayer?

*Eddie O'Hara, Caernarfon, Gwynedd*
In late abortions the baby's head is crushed, the spine broken and the body torn to pieces in order to get the bits out through the cervix. How can anyone with a spark of compassion condone such cruelty? If we *saw* these late abortions on TV we would bombard our MPs with demands to stop the killing.

*Donna Covey, London SW17*
The cover was both sickening and stupid — but it should not have been a surprise. Alton's position is primarily an attempt to uphold and extend the supreme right of the male state, supported by the male church, to dictate decisions about women's bodies. For many women on the left a new "enemy within" is emerging from the woodwork.

The Conservative Party can expect to govern for many years to come if the left is now so disunited that the *NS* feels confident in using its front cover to undermine the rights of women.

## Labour's awkward squad

*A. L. Keen, Brentford, Middx*
Your leader (*NS* 15 Jan.) says that "It really is time for thinking people to come to the aid of the Party". True. It always is. But "thinking" is not what describes John Prescott, David Warburton, Tony Benn or — if he can't understand that a general election contest between parties is not "divisive" and a contest within the party is — Francis Wheen.

Apart from the fact that he doesn't think that the left *can* run the Labour Party *and* sustain socialist principles, Ben Pimlott has it right. A contest would be a feast for the "media carnivores", a blessed relief for the shambolic Alliance, a complete diversion from serious reviewing or campaigning and altogether a disaster for Labour. How could any Labour



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Party member left, right or centre even contemplate such sabotage? How, above all, could they pretend that they were standing in order — of all things — to improve the campaigning appeal of the party?

*Anthony Arblaster, Sheffield*
As you rightly say, there has never been a time when open debate and new ideas were more necessary to Labour's survival. But to dismiss Tony Benn in this context as someone who only "speaks for a backward-looking tradition in the party" is frankly ludicrous, and smacks too much of those on-the-one-hand/on-the-other editorials for which the *Guardian* has long been notorious.

I know it is fashionable in certain circles to write off Tony Benn. But he has produced a steady stream of proposals for future Labour policy over many years which ought not to be despised simply because the party's leaders have ignored them. In particular he has been concerned with the issue of democracy, both within the Labour Party and the British state, and has made specific proposals to limit the present huge powers of patronage possessed by the prime minister, and to a lesser extent by all party leaders. Since the issue of democracy is precisely one of the concerns of your editorial, and since it has been consistently neglected by the Labour Party, it seems perverse to claim that Benn, of all people, has nothing useful to contribute to a genuine debate.

## Garbling Aboriginal history

*Dr James Jupp, Australian National University, Canberra*
As a life-long reader of the *New Statesman*, I was surprised at the coverage of Australian affairs by David Langsam (*NS* 15 Jan.). It was inaccurate in many respects, garbled and misleading.

Inaccuracies include the following: that Australia is the world's most multicultural society — it is not; try India, the USSR, the USA and most of the Third World . . . that British descendants are now outnumbered by others — they are not; the 1986 Census and all experts put the British descendants at 75 per cent of the population . . . that there are hundreds of thousands of Aborigines — there are not; the Census records less than 250,000 or 1.5 per cent of the population . . . that Aborigines may have lived here for 200,000 years — no expert would go higher than 70,000 and most stick at 40,000, the earliest carbon-dated evidence . . . that Gerry Hand is the "leader" of the left — he is only one left minister, two others being in the Cabinet of which he is not a member.

Garbled accounts are given of Aboriginal history in which quite recent events are merged into happenings of 150 years ago such as the Tasmanian 'black line'. There is no mention of the fact that Aborigines now enjoy the same legal status as all other citizens; that specific programs for Aborigines are funded yearly to the extent of A$2,000 for each Aboriginal man, woman and child; that Aboriginal land claims are recognised for one-third of the Northern Territory covering an area larger than all the United Kingdom; or that there is a growing Aboriginal political and intellectual leadership which takes an active role in Australian society and who should be credited with being more than passive victims.

The trouble with all "collective guilt" arguments is that they do little for those who have been disadvantaged but are psychologically satisfying for those who need to feel guilty about something. No thinking Australian is happy about the conditions in which most Aborigines live and all would welcome practical policies to improve that situation. Aborigines themselves do not want pity and charity but concrete benefits which they have had a say in developing. But breast beating about the sins of the white race will help nobody.

## Fuelling the Aids panic

*Dr Michael Fitzpatrick, London E9*
Duncan Campbell (*NS* 22 Jan.) is right to condemn the governments of the USA and Britain for their failure to allocate adequate resources for research into Aids and for the care and treatment of its victims. But by grossly exaggerating the risk of a major heterosexual epidemic in Britain and inviting even more government Aids propaganda he fuels the very prejudices he seeks to combat.

"In its second decade, the 1990s, Aids will become a predominantly heterosexual disease, just like any other sexually transmitted disease," writes Campbell. But Aids is not just like any other sexually transmitted disease. The disease which appears to have a similar mode of transmission — hepatitis B — is widely spread by the heterosexual route in the Third World, but in the West has remained endemic only among gay men and intravenous drug users for many years.

A recent conference on Aids and sex in Bloomington, Indiana "highlighted, yet again, the profound differences that exist in the mode of transmission in Africa and North America" (*Lancet*, 2/9 January). The theoretical risk of the wider spread of HIV infection via the heterosexual activities of drug abusers or bisexuals appears not to have been realised: the proportion of heterosexual cases in the United States declined last year.

The total number of cases of Aids acquired by heterosexual contact in Britain up to the end of 1987 was nine, though there were another 35 who contracted the disease abroad, mainly in Africa.

What about those who are HIV positive but have not yet developed full blown Aids? Of the total of 6,635 people identified as HIV positive in Britain up to the end of 1987, some 308 — less than five per cent of the total — were thought to have contracted the virus through heterosexual contact. This figure includes those who were heterosexually active in countries where heterosexual transmission is common.

Aids is a serious threat to gay men in Britain. Outside gay relationships it remains a rare disease, though those who are sexually active in parts of Africa or who share needles to inject drugs are at risk. Otherwise there is little to suggest any wider risk to the population. Indeed the American experience of a much larger epidemic among gay men and drug abusers confirms that the risk of a major heterosexual epidemic in Britain is minimal.

Campbell follows a radical trend on both sides of the Atlantic of exaggerating the dangers of heterosexual transmission as a way of putting pressure on the establishment to put more resources into tackling the real problems of finding a cure and providing care for Aids sufferers. This is a dangerous tactic. Through the efforts of the tabloid press Aids has become firmly established in the popular imagination as "the gay plague". Raising the spectre of a major heterosexual epidemic is not only unjustified, it can only encourage anti-gay prejudice.

Campbell wants more safe sex propaganda along the lines of the Tory government's "rightly admired" *Don't die of ignorance* campaign. It is ironic that the left should take at face value the public health propaganda of a government that has done more than any for decades to undermine both public health and public health care. As its abolition of the Health Education Council showed, this government is not interested in health education. It does however recognise in the Aids scare a powerful vehicle for promoting its ideology of conventional family values. It little expected to find the left urging it go even further in encouraging a national preoccupation with sexual and personal relationships.

Campbell concludes that Aids "represents the greatest of all threats to civil liberties, the failure to succour life itself". This is not even true in Africa where Aids is a very real threat to life. As a recent Unicef poster observes "more people have died from diarrhoeal dehydration in the last two days than have died from Aids in the last two years", and asks "when is the world going to panic about it?" If the left continues to follow alarmist and irrational views of the sort put forward by Campbell it is in danger of losing all perspective on social problems at home and abroad.


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# BILLBOARD

Enquiries: Jenny Shramenko 01-739 1645

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German Historical Institute, London
Tuesday 2 February, 5pm
Prof. Margaret Gowing, CBE (Oxford)

*The Origin of Britain's Status as a Nuclear Power*

17 Bloomsbury Square
London WC1A 2LP

Tea from 4.30pm Seminar starts 5pm

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## EVENTS

**OLDER WOMEN'S GET-TOGETHER.** If you remember Alma Cogan, you qualify for a convivial occasion at the Hen House on Valentine's weekend (12/13/14 Feb). A country house party to have you swapping addresses as well as reminiscences. £46 full board, inclusive. Veg food choices, central heating, good walks, bar. Details from Hawerby Hall, North Thoresby, Lincs, 0472 840278. W5.2

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**COMMUNIST PARTY BOOKSALE** – thousands of new and second-hand books, Saturday 6 February, 11am - 4pm at the Africa Centre, 38 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2. W5.10

**SALE AT HOUSEMANS** Bookshop – 5 Caledonian Rd, King's Cross. One-third discount or more on selected titles. Sale starts 30 January. W5.11

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## PERSONAL

**HAVE A HEART FOR THE N.H.S.** support the Nurses' strike with a Valentines message to Thatcher. Special cards 5 for 50p. Post free LDCP 224-236 Walworth Road, SE17. Tel. 708 1204. W5.6

**WANTED** Playwright/Librettist to work on exciting project/idea with composer in the same vein as Lloyd-Webber and Rice. Box (04)0851. W5.7

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**LAST THROW OF THE DICE.** I need a good warm, 40s, bright, slim, wanton, for the long-term. Am I asking too much? Box (04)0697. W5.23

**MAN, 40,** flat, car, decent job, North London, wide interests, good company, apolitical, thoroughly domesticated seeks mistress, possibly a bit older, who knows what it's all about. I don't mind travelling. Box (04)0698. W5.24

**OLDER WOMAN** preferred (by Worthing man, 36), for relationship that doesn't 'go all the way'. The preliminaries are more fun! Box (04)0693. W5.25

**OLD FRIENDS:** an introduction agency for the over forties. Loneliness is not inevitable. Details from: Anne Brent, 18a Highbury New Park, London N5 2DB. 01-226 5432. W4.17

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**WOMAN (36),** seeks man for committed relationship and possible child(ren). Box (04)0695. W5.29

**YOUNG WOMAN,** 26, 5ft 5ins, slim, curly hair, seeks affectionate relationship with woman, 30 to forties, in Oxford area. Photo appreciated. Box (04)0689. W5.30


AGENDA

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Deadline: 2pm Mondays


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### MON 1 FEB

**LONDON HISTORY WORKSHOP SEMINAR.** Tristan Platt: 'Miracle Cults & Shamanism in South Andean Society: social renewal & ethno-historical periodization'. 7.30 p.m. at The White Swan, 14 New Row, WC2.


**THE MURALS OF DIEGO RIVERA**
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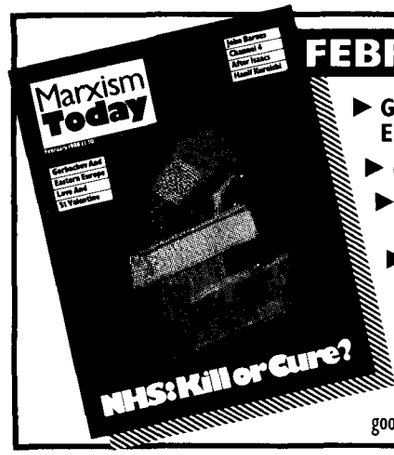


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- Gorbachev and Eastern Europe
- Love and St Valentine
- Michael Grade at Channel Four
- Profile of Hanif Kureishi

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# Weekend competition

**No 3010** **Set by Gray Dorn**

Incredibly, many British women remain ignorant of nuclear power's life-enhancing properties. As you'll see in any current women's magazine, British Nuclear Fuel are doing their best with limited public funds to enlighten them. But are their new ads good enough? Try to do better, with a text ad and slogan. 250 words max. please, by 10 February.

**No 3007** **Set by Russell Lucas**

Excerpts from Princess Di's memoirs as ghosted by Kathy Acker, Susan Sontag, Angela Carter *et al.*

**Report** **By Gray Dorn**

Never mind *why* I'm back. Just accept it and rejoice. Only 23 entries this week, including one from Gerry Hamill addressed to comp. no 1507 (only 20 years late, Gerry) containing an obscure parody of S. J. Perelman, one from someone who is clearly insane, one in passable French from Wales (boring, but then so's Françoise Sagan) and two from E.O. Parrott neither of which we're going to print because a) even Fiona Pitt-Kethley writes better verse than that and b) a poem beginning; "I had always expected that a Royal penis/Would turn out to be Something Special" might just induce the old parasites to break with tradition and sue us to hell. All right? Otherwise, apart from the fact that it's obvious none of you have actually read Kathy Acker, fair to good. £12 to the winners (I see prizes, unlike wages, have risen during my absence).

*Angela Carter*

Alone in my bedchamber, in a nervous ecstasy of anticipation, I waited, fingering the cool, silken undulation of the sheets. Outside in the mysterious night there was not a single note of sound, as if the world had *clapped its hand over its mouth until I, the girlish bride,* gave it the signal to speak.

Even the bathroom, where he, the aged, enigmatic beast-king, was preparing for the thrilling ceremony, stayed silent. No clock ticked. My mirror was an icy pool that could drown me in thick, entangled weeds. I held my breath and my palms pressed with an unbearable intimacy against the counterpane.

Then he entered: not antler- and fur-clad, as my feverish imaginings had foretold, but in a ballooning swell of check pyjamas. My destiny, my love.

"Air-hair-lair!" I cried, uncontainable.

BASIL RANSOME-DAVIES

*Fiona Pitt-Kethley*

I lay and thought of England, as we stretched limb to limb,
Of Scotland and of Wales as well (of course I thought of *him*),
And then I thought of Buck House, and of Her Majesty,
And couldn't help but wonder what she really thought of me,
I thought of far Balmoral, and, choking back a sob,
I wondered what Victoria thought, with Albert on the job,
And next I thought of Sandringham, so flat and drear and dank,
But all this thinking tired me — I'm as thick as any plank,
So I hummed my favourite hit song (for weeks it's topped the charts),
And fell asleep and dreamt of Windsor Castle's private parts.

STANLEY J. SHARPLESS

*Susan Sontag*

Charley was dismissive when I suggested that what we needed was a Leni Riefenstahl.

"I'm not", he reflected, "interested in the fascist rhetoric of the will."

I reminded him about the black-leather, whips and sadomasochistic diversions of the bedroom, asking slyly whether he could detect resonances in our rituals of domination and enslavement in his Gordonstoun experience.

While he conceded that fetishism at a personal level was an essential constituent of his stimulation, he rejected hypothesising individual alienation into institutional metaphors, adding that the subversive nature of boudoir obsessions sublimated more overt expressions of dark needs.

"That's hypocrisy", I giggled.

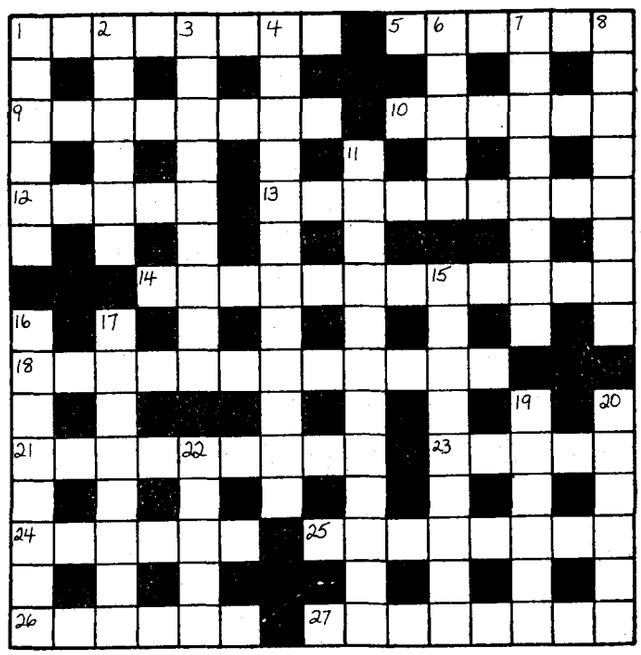
"An English aphrodisiac," he snapped.

Bataille, had of course implied as much in his corny observations on defilement and sexual experience, but I kept that to myself.

CONNIE YAPP

# Weekend Crossword 1584

**PRIZES: £5 Book Tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1584, New Statesman, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ, by first post 15 February.**



Name_____

Address_____

## ACROSS

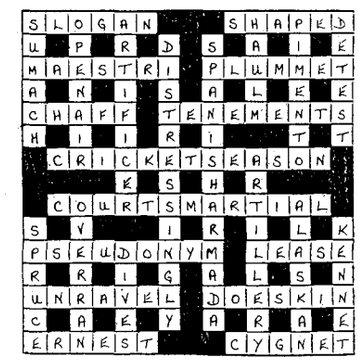
1. Spies act obscurely, getting away from reality (8)
5. One of these farms is frequently after credit (6)
9. Not certain to deprive the skilful at the pithead (8)
10. Means of power which makes the favourite start to go round (6)
12. The writer, we hear, is austere (5)
13. Unrefined variety of eglantine (9)
14. The unmarried were concerned, having only one aim in life (12)
18. Make prisoner of war call for me, a non-combatant (12)
21. Eastern girl is something for the shoulder (9)
23. Giant article in a journal (5)
24. Prove too clever for a fool from Oxford (6)
25. Not a single animal is about to topple a beginner (8)
26. Being a pervert, one is in an unhappy way (6)
27. Security measure taken when there is a shortage during battle (8)

## DOWN

1. Remove from cover and put something soaking back in river (6)
2. Caught with intimate friend, seen in the grass (6)
3. Obvious argument for one who appears in court (9)
4. Race for getting rid of the silver? (12)
6. Magistrate dealing with first offender (5)
7. Direction to go when there is fighting in cars (8)
8. Nothing left in rearranging duties since there is lack of company (8)
11. It turns out he relaxes, being fond of girls (12)
15. Nice one potentially about to go on for a long time, being rigid (9)
16. River which brings pain to an agitated soul (8)
17. Struck when the devil took part in a performance (8)
19. Place for duck and apple pie (6)
20. Two coins going up (6)
22. Beastly places in which liberal manners are displayed (5)

SETSQUARE

**Solution to 1582**



**Prizewinners to 1582**

P. Baldwin (Chorley, Lancs.)
Geoff Wallis (London N8)
G. Williamson (Saffron Walden, Essex)



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SI SR. PRESIDENTE... SI... NO, I DIDN'T I... SI, SR... SI SENOR PRESIDENTE, RIGHT AWAY!
PLEASE EXCUSE SR. I'VE MADE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE. OF COURSE IT WASN'T VERY SERIOUS AND YOU ARE FREE TO GO... GOOD-BYE.
HELLO, MIGUEL? CANCEL THE FIRING SQUAD, WILL YOU?...
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# Chess

A SURVEY of newsagents and bookstalls would leave you wondering whether such a thing as a chess magazine was published in English. In fact there is quite a good range of periodicals being produced at the moment, but there is a market that they are failing to reach simply because they are not stocked for casual inspection. To get hold of them you would need to subscribe. At least, that's true at the moment because of the old catch about no-demand-for-that-sort-of-thing. So I'll mention a few worth demanding.

In first place I shall have to put the monthly *British Chess Magazine* (9 Market Street, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN38 0DQ). Having been on the go since 1881, it has a reassuring feeling of permanence and stability to it. In a world where the life-span of a magazine is so often short, such endurance is likely to be an indicator of fitness to survive and the *BCM* is one of the very best of those published outside the USSR. It covers just about all aspects of middlegame play, notes on chess history, special sections on correspondence chess, problems, studies, etc.

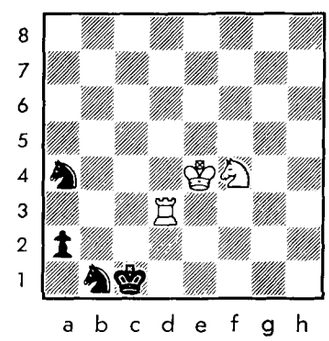
If the *BCM* has a weakness, it is that through aspiring to be a journal of record it tends to be a mite too staid for some tastes. In school chess clubs the livelier, chattier *Chess* was always more popular. *Chess* has been coming out for over 50 years. It wasn't always as regular as its readers would have wished, but since a hiatus was usually followed by a double issue they could rely on good value in the long run. But finally the question arose as to how long that run would be. Surely Baruch H. Wood, the founding editor, would have to give up one day? And what then? Fortunately the future for *Chess* now seems settled. Pergamon have bought the title and the magazine will be re-launched in March (from Railway Road, Sutton Coldfield B73 6AZ).

To judge from the pilot issue already circulated it will be a slicker production than before, but with much the same style that made *Chess* popular in the past. Above all, I do hope that the 'How Good Is Your Chess?' feature is retained. This was an annotated game, with a difference. You were invited to imagine that you were playing on one side of the board, had to cover up the rest of the page with a postcard, of something like that, and guess what the next move for your side was to be. Points were awarded for good choices (or subtracted for blunders). At the end of the game you totted up your total of points, and were told what a wonderful player you were. It was great — anybody who peeked beneath his postcard often enough could be an undiscovered grandmaster!

A newcomer which has yet to prove its stamina is *Kingpin* (6 St George's Road, Ilford IG1 3PQ), the jester among chess magazines. It's written throughout in that puerile, say-it-with-a-snigger style that has become so familiar. Should we blame it all on Douglas Adams and his *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*? In theory *Kingpin* is a quarterly, though in practice it seems to be produced with the idea of bursting upon readers when they are least expecting it. It went glossy on the outside last year, often an ominous symptom, but I hope it can survive.

Those three magazines are suitable for players of a broad range of strength and interests. There are also things that even chessplayers would regard as rather specialised. For example, those with an interest in the history of chess will find *Chess Notes* (compiled by Edward Winter, 9 rue de la Maladière, CH-1205 Geneva, Switzerland) both a useful source of information and a lively forum for debate. Recent issues contained a heated controversy over whether a certain letter contained evidence that Paul Morphy was a homosexual, lots of games played by Reshevsky before his eleventh birthday, the text of reports that Alekhine wrote for *The New York Times* on his 1929 match with Bogoljubow, and everything you ever wanted to know about Prince Dadian of Mingrelia. The book reviews, by Winter, are one of the strengths of *Chess Notes*. His critique of the Kasparov (with Trelford) book *Child of Change* is too potent to be missed: 'everything one has come to expect of Kasparov: passionate, supercharged and challenging, yet immature, speculative and deceptive . . . the careless and untrustworthy book that all the cosily venomous interviews presaged.'

For endgame studies there is nothing to beat John Roycroft's *EG* (18 New Way Road, London NW9 6PL), which has a small but world-wide circulation. Never mind the snob-appeal, it's a shame that the readership is so select since each issue of *EG* contains marvellous goodies like this 1985 study by Manvelyan. White to play and draw. Given the material, you won't be surprised that the main theme is forks with the White Knight. But, as a hint to solving, I think I should warn you that there is a surprise on move 4 when the White King coolly steps away from the battle.




**George Botterill**

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# This England

£3 Book Tokens for entries printed. (Postcards please.)

☐ Council workers are to be given an extra £1.50 a day — just for turning up. The bonus to be paid to 102 labourers and craftsmen at Hyndburn council is aimed at cutting abesenteeism. — *Daily Express* (A. R. Horwell)

☐ DHSS officials realised their mistake after they sent jobless John McLean a 1p cheque. They did the sums again and a week later he got a second cheque — for another 1p. John said at his home in Stockton-on-Tees: "Sending a penny once was stupid. Twice is insane." — *Daily Mirror* (George Moor)

☐ They are telling the tale in Throgmorton Street about Mrs Thatcher out strolling with her secretary. They stopped in front of a large shop window. "See," Mrs Thatcher said, pointing to a notice. "Jackets £30, trousers £20. How can people say we are not beating inflation?" "Madam," replied the secretary "that is a dry-cleaner's". — *The Times* (Leonard Cox)

☐ Albion's travelling fans have devised a neat way of taking what the police call "offensive weapons" into grounds. They load up with sticks of celery. And at the command "celery, celery . . ." the stuff is hurled into the air. When police frisk Albion supporters, they assume the celery is food. — *Brighton Evening Argus* (John Davie)



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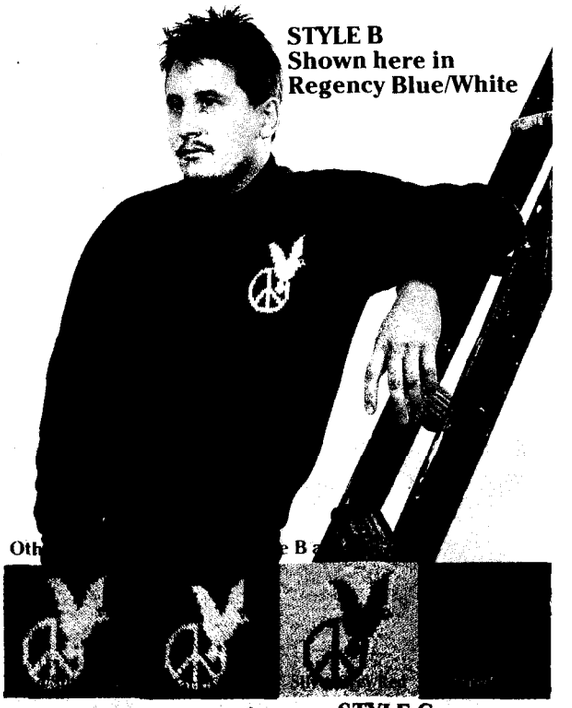
- **EACH JUMPER ONLY £39.99** Inclusive of Postage and Packing

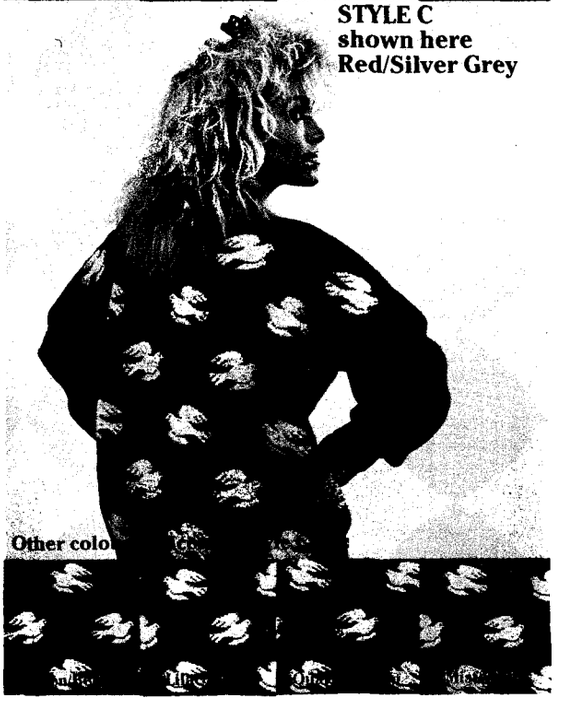
This is a unique ranges of superb, high-quality hand-framed designer knitwear on a distinct Peace theme. Any one of these 100% Pure Shetland Wool jumpers would make an ideal Christmas present for family, friends . . . or as a special personal treat!! Exclusivity is assured – these jumpers are being made in a strictly limited edition. And ordering is so easy . . . see the panel below for full details.



**STYLE B Shown here in Regency Blue/White**

Oth … e B …

**STYLE A Rainbow and Dove on Black background**



**STYLE C shown here Red/Silver Grey**

Other colo…

**Cut and post to GARETH KNITWEAR, PO BOX 80, NEWPORT, GWENT NP9 0TZ**

PLEASE SEND ME..... (Qty) PEACE JUMPERS AT £39.99 EACH (inclusive of postage and packing).

| State Style A, B, C | COLOUR CHOICE | State Size S,M,L,XL | PRICE |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | £39.99 |
| | | | £39.99 |
| | | | £39.99 |
| | | | £39.99 |
| | | | £39.99 |

**I ENCLOSE CHEQUE OR P.O. FOR £**

(Cheques and postal orders should be crossed "& Co" and made payable to Gareth Knitwear).

**OR PLEASE DEBIT MY ACCESS CARD NUMBER**

Access

Signature .....

Name: Mr/Mrs/Miss .....

Address .....

.....

..... Post code .....

Allow 28 days for delivery. Product normally despatched within 10 days (offer subject to availability to UK excluding Channel Islands).

## 2 WAYS TO ORDER

**1** Instant Telephone Ordering – Access Card Holders may telephone orders direct by phoning (0633) 51868. No order form needed. (Sorry – cards other than Access are not accepted).

**2** By post – fill in the order form opposite. This allows you to order up to 5 separate jumpers at £39.99 each inclusive of postage and packing. Use a separate line for each jumper you wish to order. Remember on each line to state whether Style A, B or C wanted, your choice of colours for that style from the options given, and the size of the jumper you require. If you wish to order more than 5 jumpers, please give details on separate sheet and attach to the order form. DON'T FORGET to fill in your name and address and correct Post Code, to sign the order form, and to enclose your cheque or postal order for the full correct amount, or to quote your Access card number in the box provided if you wish to pay by credit card. (Sorry – cards other than Access are not accepted).

## SIZE DETAILS

Each jumper is available in SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE, EXTRA LARGE sizes.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Small to fit | 34"–36" | Large to fit | 38"–40" |
| Medium to fit | 36"–38" | Extra Large to fit | 42"–44" |

## GUARANTEE

We want you to be completely satisfied with anything you buy from us. If for any reason you are not you may return your purchase in perfect condition within 14 days of receipt and we will replace it or refund your money in full. This *guarantee is in addition to your statutory rights.*

## FURTHER HELP

We will be pleased to help you with any queries or difficulties, or if you have any special requirements. Please write to us FREEPOST or phone (0633) 51868 during normal office hours for personal service.

**GARETH KNITWEAR, GARETH LIFESTYLES LTD., UNIT 11, VENTURE PARK, LILLESHALL STREET, NEWPORT, GWENT NP9 0FB**

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